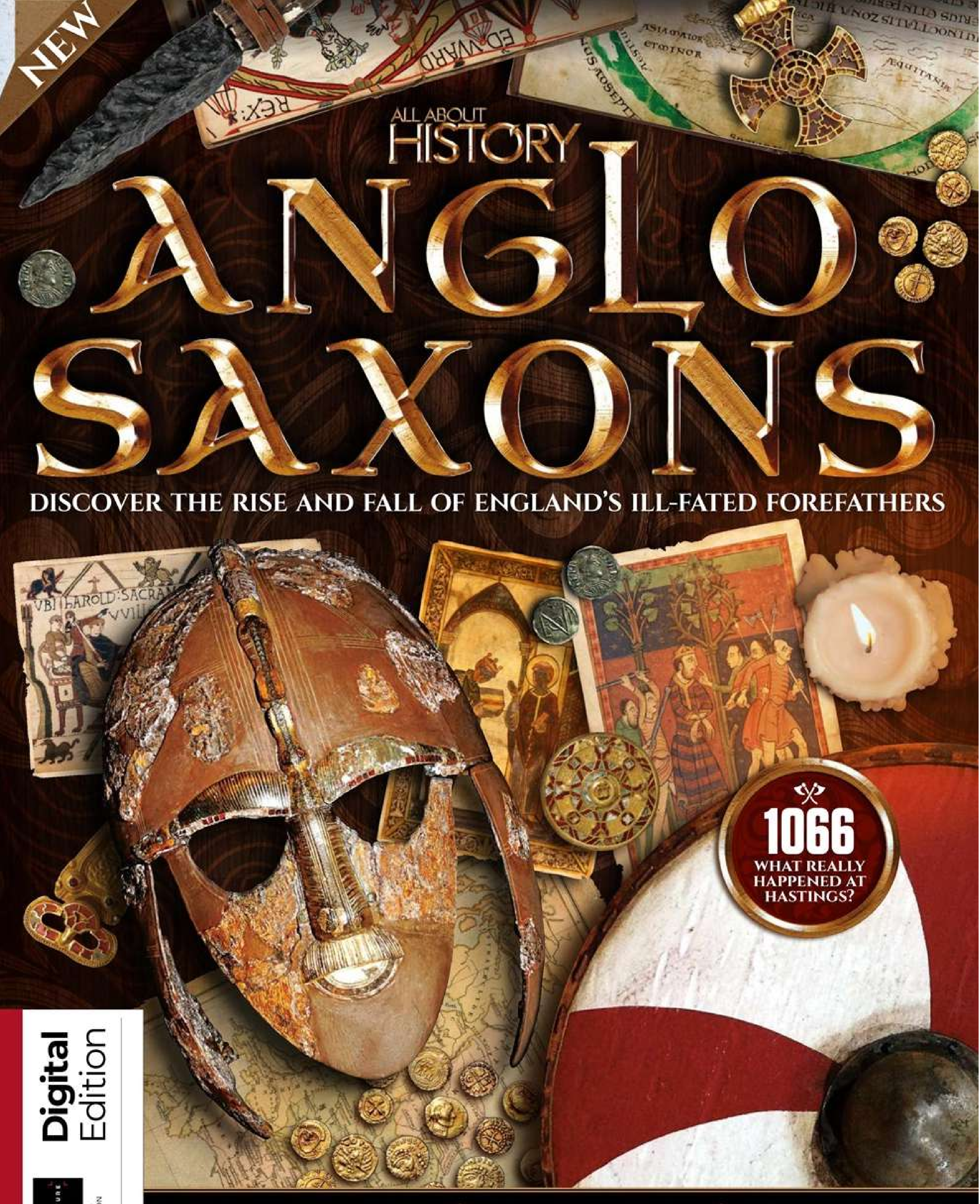
NEW

ALL ABOUT HISTORY

ANGLO-SAXONS

DISCOVER THE RISE AND FALL OF ENGLAND'S ILL-FATED FOREFATHERS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1066
WHAT REALLY HAPPENED AT HASTINGS?

Digital Edition

FUTURE
THIRD EDITION

VIKING INVASION † SUTTON HOO † KING ALFRED

Welcome to

ALL ABOUT HISTORY ANGLO SAXONS

When William the Conqueror won on the battlefield in 1066, he didn't just usurp a country's throne – he personally oversaw the end of a vibrant and lively era of British history. He stamped out every last pocket of resistance that he could, but no matter how hard he tried, the legacy of the Anglo-Saxons would live on.

In All About History Book of the Anglo-Saxons, uncover how seven separate kingdoms slowly joined together, and find out why King Alfred became known as 'the Great'. Explore what life was really like, and meet the deadly Viking raiders who managed to conquer part of England. Get up close and personal with the final Anglo-Saxon kings, and discover what really happened in the last days before everything changed forever…

FUTURE

ANGLO SAXONS

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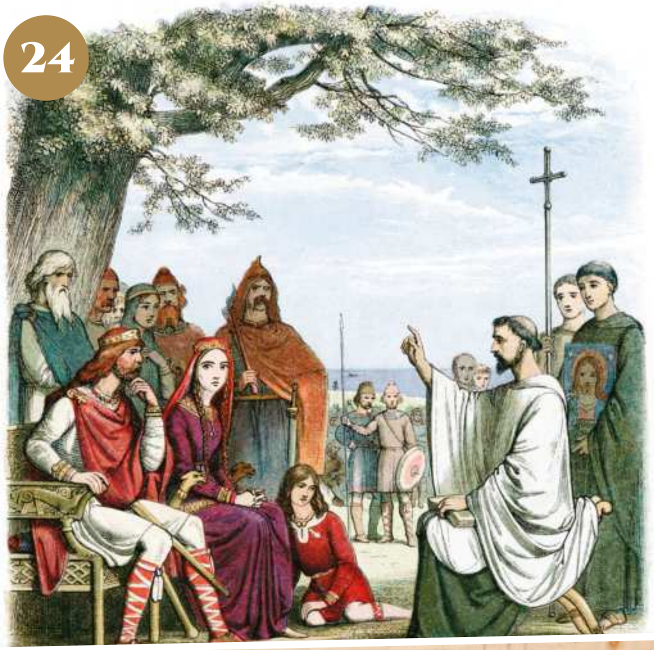

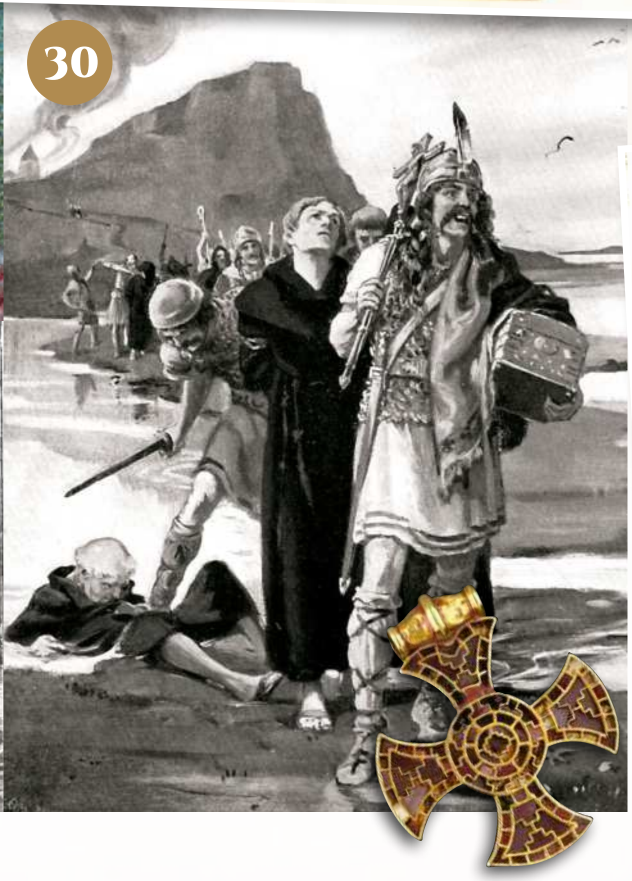

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Later tradition states that Gildas emigrated to Brittany and founded a monastery there, known as Saint-Gildas-de-Rhuys

ORIGINS OF THE ANGLO-SAXONS

Where did the Anglo-Saxons come from and how many of them were there in the first place?

Written by **Edoardo Albert**

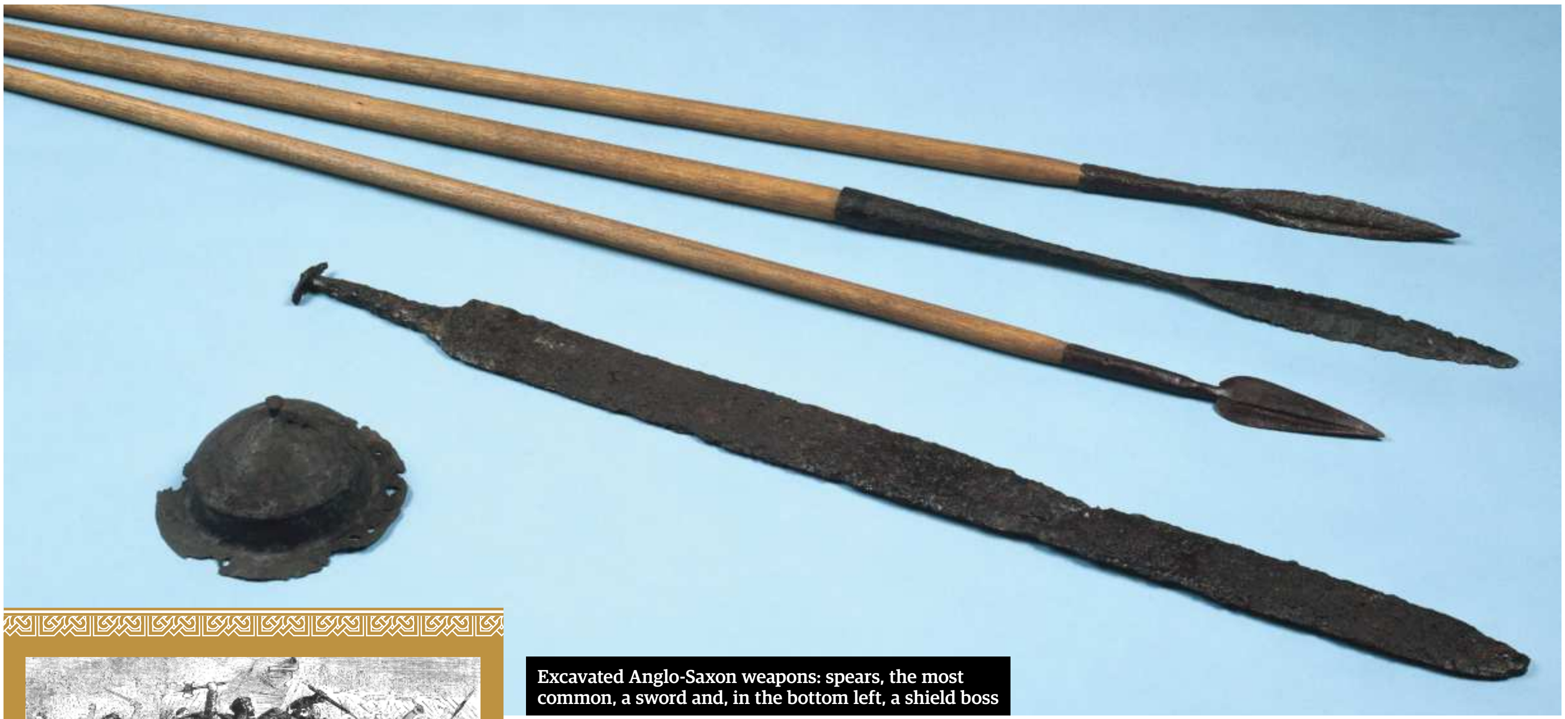
In the 6th century, a British cleric named Gildas wrote, in elegant Latin, a jeremiad against the corrupt and decadent rulers of his people who, through their sins, had called God's vengeance down upon them and their realms. That vengeance took the form of blond-haired, moustachioed warriors. The book Gildas wrote was called *De Excidio Britanniae* (*On the Ruin of Britain*) and it's the only contemporary source we have for what was happening in Britain in the two centuries after the Romans left in 410 CE.

Those blond warriors were Angles and Saxons - Germanic-speaking peoples who came from the flat, marshy regions of what are today northern Germany and southern Denmark. According to Gildas, they had been invited to the country as mercenaries and then had turned on their employer, a king named Vortigern in some manuscripts, and started carving out kingdoms of their own, driving out the native Britons and displacing them with their own people who came over the grey whale road that crossed the storm-tossed waters of the North Sea.

The story of the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons was elaborated in later accounts. The leaders of the original band of mercenaries were named as the brothers Hengist and Horsa, who landed with their men at Ebbsfleet on the Isle of Thanet. There is archaeological evidence for a Germanic presence in Kent in the early 5th century from burials where the body was wearing the sort of things on the belt that was typical of Germans in the service of Rome. According to the accounts in Bede and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the German mercenaries were first recruited to fight the Picts - there had been a number of Pictish incursions into Roman-ruled Britain even in the days of the empire - but when they had fulfilled that commission, and seeing that the land they'd come to was rich, they sent back word to their native lands, calling for reinforcements. The country, the brothers said, was ripe for the taking.

In 455 CE, the brothers battled with Vortigern. Horsa died as a result, but Vortigern was defeated and Hengist established himself as the first king of Kent. Later chroniclers embellished the story, telling how Vortigern became infatuated with Hengist's daughter and how the girl, working with her father, manipulated Vortigern into giving Hengist and his men more territory in return for her hand in marriage. Thus Britain was lost to the Britons through the lust of one man.

For Gildas, the coming of the Saxons was an unmitigated disaster, though one consequent upon the actions of the tyrants against whom he railed in his book. But if his account gives little detail as to what was actually happening in Britain at the time - there are no dates and only a handful of names - the account itself tells us a lot about what was still possible in Britain around 540, over a century after the Romans had left. It tells us that Britons could still benefit from a classical education,



Excavated Anglo-Saxon weapons: spears, the most common, a sword and, in the bottom left, a shield boss

Was Arthur really a friend to the English, or a champion of the Britons?

The once and future king

The legendary king of England, Arthur, actually fought against the English

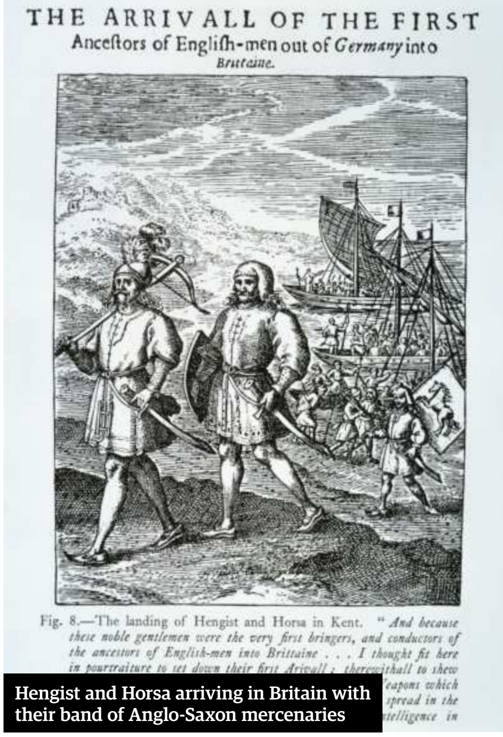
The legendary image of Arthur, the once and future king, who will return in England's direst need to heroically fight against any enemies, is somewhat undercut by the fact that, if he existed at all, Arthur actually fought against the English as a champion of the native Britons, the people who would become the Welsh.

But Arthur's very existence is a moot point. The earliest definite reference to him is in the *Historia Brittonum* (*History of the Britons*), which was written in Wales around 830, so at least three centuries after when he was supposed to have lived. In the *Historia*, Arthur is the dux bellorum (duke of battles) rather than a king, who leads the Britons to 12 victories over the Anglo-Saxons, the last being at Mount Badon. This is interesting because Gildas also talks about a victory for the Britons at Mount Badon, the battle taking place in the year of his birth, as well as naming the man who rallied the Britons after the shock of the initial Saxon invasion.

Unfortunately for Arthurian apologists, Gildas names this war leader as Ambrosius Aurelianus, rather than Arthur. That the Britons had war leaders who rallied them against the invaders seems certain: whether the greatest of these was really called Arthur, we simply cannot say.

learning Latin and its associated literary culture, as well as being steeped in biblical texts and exegesis. Gildas was a learned and cultured man, a civilised one in the fullest sense of the term, and for him the Anglo-Saxons were nothing but barbarians: pagan illiterates whose only use for a book was to turn it into kindling.

The conquest of Britain was conducted in slow-motion. It took centuries, with the fortunes of both sides fluctuating hugely for the first two centuries, but in the end the Anglo-Saxons prevailed. The Britons became the Welsh – a word derived from 'wealh' in Old English, meaning 'foreigner' but with a telling secondary meaning of 'slave' – and the Germans became the English, while further north the Picts were Scottish, while the Scots were still living in Ireland. Into those lost centuries, the Britons placed the tales of a hero, Arthur, who turned back the Anglo-Saxon tide for a while.



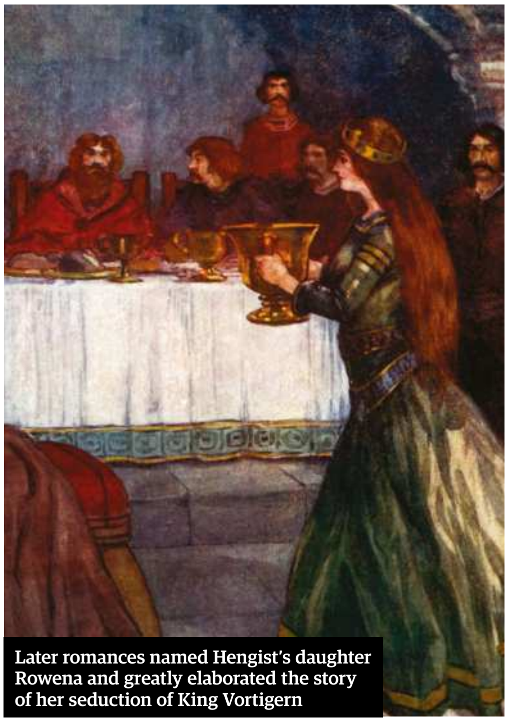
THE ARRIVALL OF THE FIRST
Anceſtors of Engliſh-men out of Germany into
Brittaine.

Fig. 8.—The landing of Hengist and Horsa in Kent. "*And because these noble gentlemen were the very first bringers, and conductors of the ancestors of English-men into Brittaine . . . I thought fit here in pourtraiture to set down their first Arivall; therewithall to shew*
eapons which
spread in the
telligence in

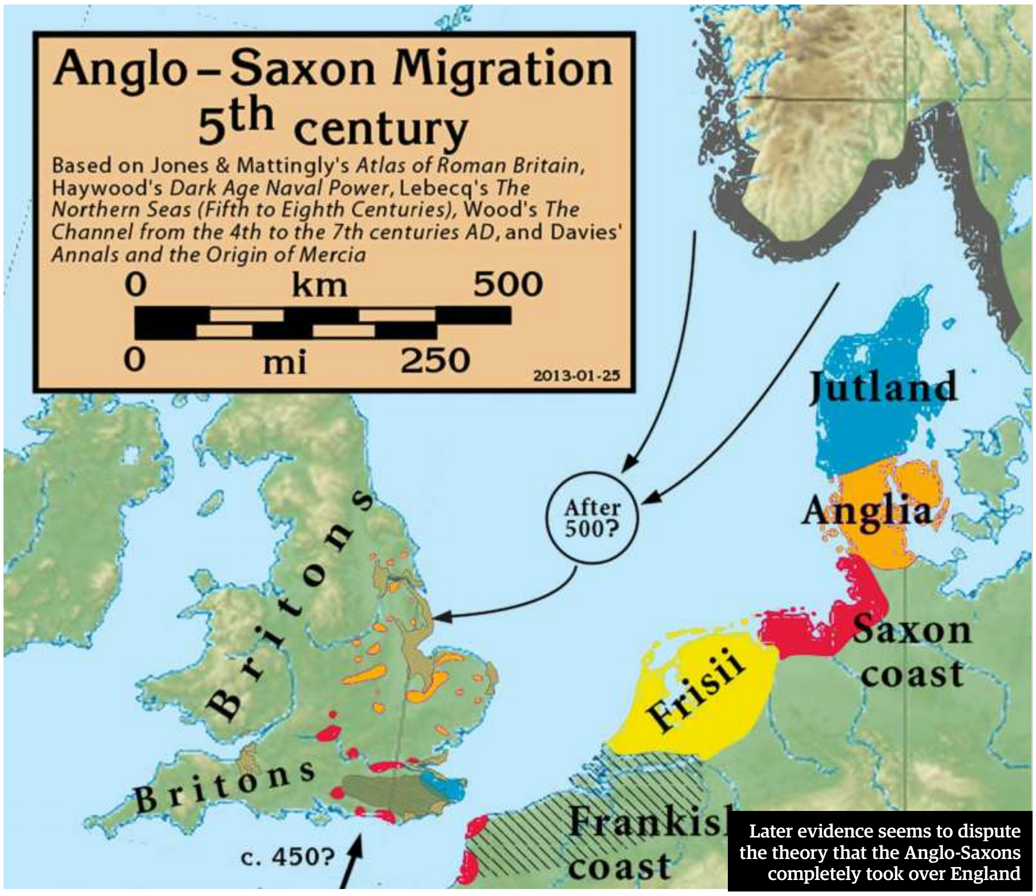
Hengist and Horsa arriving in Britain with their band of Anglo-Saxon mercenaries

But was it really a conquest? With no other sources available, scholars accepted the view of someone who lived through the Adventus Saxonum, accepting it as indeed a mass movement of peoples from the regions where the Rhine flows to the sea to Britain. But in the later decades of the 20th century, a new generation of scholars began to question this picture. Archaeological analysis of historic tree pollen records indicated that there had been very little change in tree-cover levels during this period, where whole regions were supposedly depopulated, the native Britons fleeing before the advancing Anglo-Saxons (some fled overseas, founding a new kingdom in what came to be called Brittany in France). But if farmers had fled, then productive land should have turned to scrub, wood and even forest if left untended long enough. However, there was no evidence for these changes in the pollen record: the land seemed to have stayed under the same levels of cultivation throughout this period.

So maybe the farmers stayed put throughout, ploughing and sowing and reaping, while around them bands of warriors fought their little wars, one elite – pagan and Anglo-Saxon – displacing another – Christian and Briton. But the new Anglo-Saxon elite, by virtue of the possession of arms and their place at the top of the social hierarchy, slowly imposed their language and culture on the peasant farmers who remained, farming the land as they had always done. By this view, rather than there being a massive replacement of peoples, the Anglo-Saxons arrived as war bands, removed the native



Later romances named Hengist's daughter Rowena and greatly elaborated the story of her seduction of King Vortigern


Anglo – Saxon Migration
5th century
Based on Jones & Mattingly's Atlas of Roman Britain, Haywood's Dark Age Naval Power, Lebecq's The Northern Seas (Fifth to Eighth Centuries), Wood's The Channel from the 4th to the 7th centuries AD, and Davies' Annals and the Origin of Mercia
0 km 500
0 mi 250
2013-01-25
Jutland
Anglia
Saxon coast
Frisii
Frankish coast
After 500?
Britons
Britons
c. 450?

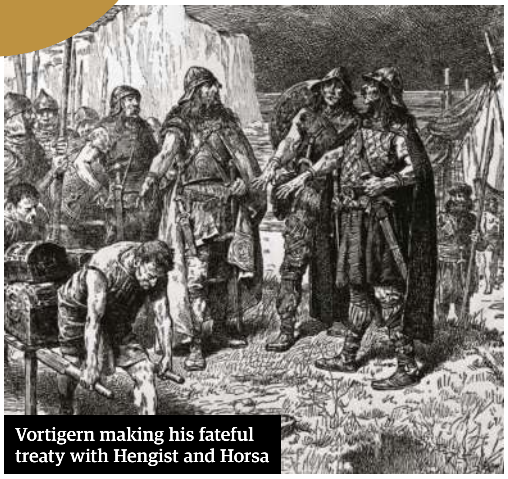
Later evidence seems to dispute the theory that the Anglo-Saxons completely took over England

warrior elite, and installed themselves at the top of the social tree, taking wives among the Britons but ensuring that their language and culture predominated in the areas that they controlled.

Some historians, however, caviled at this interpretation of the evidence. In particular, the specialists in place names pointed out that there are few place names in England that derive from the Celtic - the vast majority have their origin in Old English. But if a native, Britonnic peasantry had remained working the land for a new set of Anglo-Saxon masters, then we would expect there to be many more names of Celtic origin, for the simple reason that the new lord of the manor would ask his peasants, 'Hey, that copse over there, what's it called?' Hearing the answer, he'd then tell his compliant peasants, 'Go chop down some trees from 'coedlan'.' A new lord would use the names in place to order his peasants around rather than inventing a whole new set of names for the simple reason that his peasants would know what he wanted them to do.

So, did the Anglo-Saxons arrive en masse, conduct a programme of ethnic cleansing and occupy the land that would come to be known as England, or was it a case of a top-level takeover that gradually imposed its language and culture on the lower levels of society? The evidence was inconclusive and scholars were divided. Some other way of answering the question was necessary. Then along came DNA testing. Surely that would provide the answer? There have been many studies attempting to establish the ethnic origins of the peoples of Britain but unfortunately the first wave of studies provided such wildly contradictory answers that no one was any the wiser. Turns out that genetic analysis for origins is a hugely complex business that also requires large and robust sample sizes. However, further studies that take account of these difficulties seem to be gradually moving towards some likely conclusions. Firstly, that there is a very strong regional basis to genetic identity in Britain: the Cornish are different even from the Devonians, let alone with respect to the rest of the country, as are the north Welsh from the south Welsh, the Scots and the Cumbrians. The native population of Britain derives from the settlers who first arrived as the Ice Age was waning and it was still possible to walk to Britain, before the land bridge was cut around 6500 BCE. But over that foundation population, the only significant influx of peoples, localised in the south and centre of England, has their roots in the Jutland peninsula and northern Saxony, the traditional homelands of the Anglo-Saxons. Assuming that in the 5th century the population of what became England was about 1 million, then somewhere between 250,000 and 400,000 came from abroad. So it seems that the answer as to the origins of the English lies somewhere between the two opposing views: the native inhabitants were not completely pushed out, but this was not just an elite takeover. In comparison, the Normans have left very little genetic footprint on the peoples of Britain: the Conquest really was an elite takeover.

The phrase 'Anglo-Saxon' didn't actually come into use in Europe until the 8th century



Vortigern making his fateful treaty with Hengist and Horsa

The most recent archaeological work backs up this genetic analysis, with evidence of Anglo-Saxon and Britonnic settlements continuing near to each other, but there being an almost apartheid-like separation between the two communities in the first generations. However, the barriers did slowly start to come down until eventually, after a couple of centuries, they merge.

"The conquest of Britain was conducted in slow-motion"

THE HEPTARCHY

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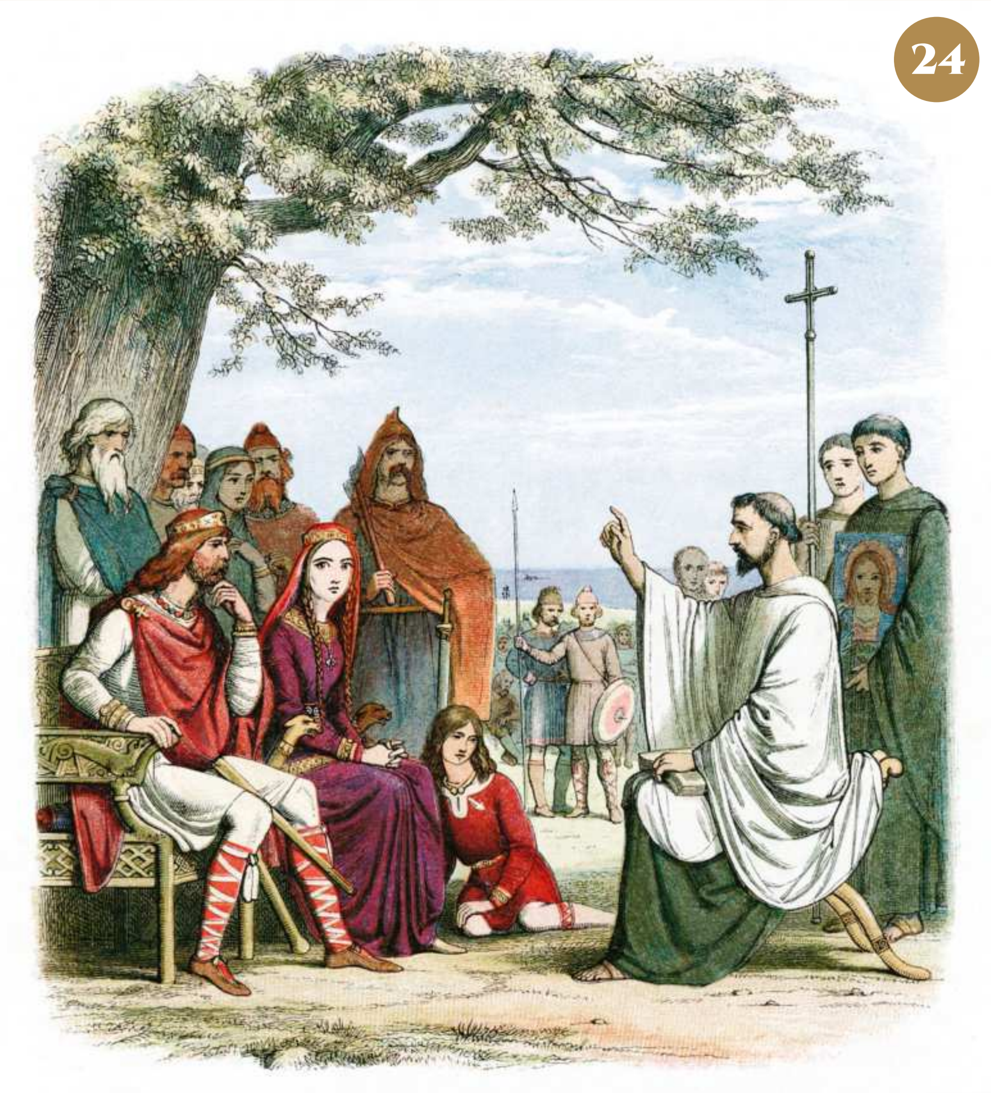
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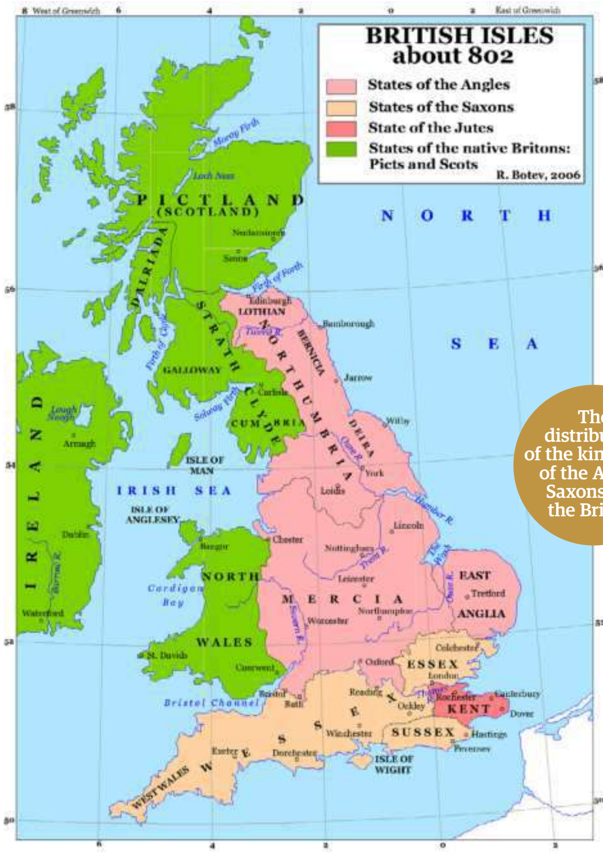

BRITISH ISLES about 802
States of the Angles
States of the Saxons
State of the Jutes
States of the native Britons: Picts and Scots
R. Botev, 2006
PICTLAND (SCOTLAND)
DALRIADA
STRATHCLYDE
GALLOWAY
CUMBRIA
LOTHIAN
NORTHUMBRIA
BERNICIA
DEIRA
NORTH SEA
IRISH SEA
IRELAND
ISLE OF MAN
ISLE OF ANGLESEY
NORTH WALES
WALES
MERCIA
EAST ANGLIA
ESSEX
KENT
SUSSEX
WESSEX
WEST WALES
ISLE OF WIGHT
Bristol Channel
Cardigan Bay
Edinburgh
Bamborough
Jarrow
Whitby
York
Leeds
Lincoln
Chester
Nottingham
Leicester
Northampton
Worcester
Colchester
London
Oxford
Reading
Bath
Rochester
Canterbury
Dover
Winchester
Hastings
Exeter
Dorchester
Dublin
Armagh
Waterford

The distribution of the kingdoms of the Anglo-Saxons and the Britons

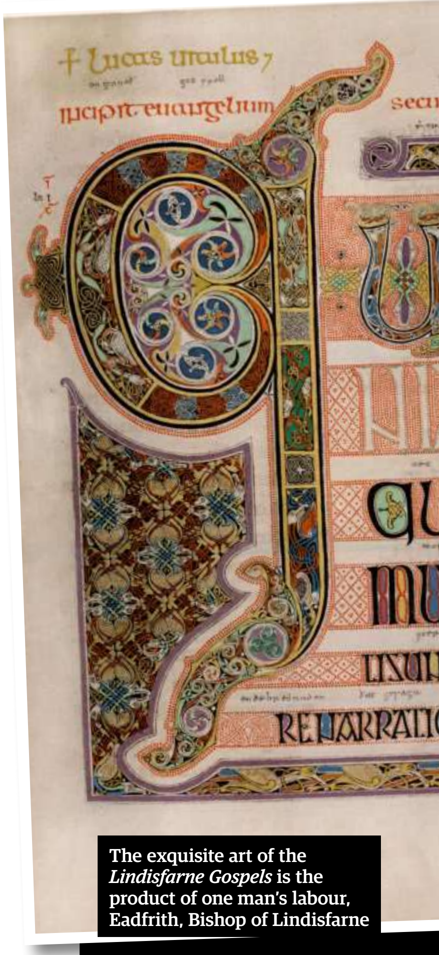
The Seven Kingdoms

Out of the chaos of the end of an empire, seven kingdoms emerged, known as the Heptarchy

Written by **Edoardo Albert**

Britain was a very different place in the chaotic centuries after the Roman legions left in 410 CE. With the breakdown of the centralised Roman administration, the country dissolved into innumerable petty kingdoms, many now completely lost to memory, contending with each other for short-lived dominance. Into this mix came the Anglo-Saxons, sailing over the North Sea and using the rivers and estuaries of east and south Britain as their highways into this new country where they were carving out kingdoms. Roads were few and often dangerous. The sea and rivers provided much surer and safer means of travel. These bands of warriors established new kingdoms and brought their families over the North Sea to join them, but they fought as enthusiastically among themselves as they fought with their British neighbours.

Slowly, the smallest kingdoms were swallowed up, incorporated into larger realms and as a victorious king could give more gold and glory to warriors who came to his court, this process became self-reinforcing, leading to the gradual amalgamation of all the smaller kingdoms until there were seven, and finally four, Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in England.



The exquisite art of the *Lindisfarne Gospels* is the product of one man's labour, Eadfrith, Bishop of Lindisfarne

Bamburgh Castle, the ancient stronghold of the Idings. St Oswald's Gate preserves some of the Anglo-Saxon defences

Northumbria

The realm of heroes and saints

The clue is in the name; Northumbria was the Anglo-Saxon kingdom north of the Humber. At its peak it was the largest and most powerful Anglo-Saxon kingdom and, through being home to Bede for all his life, it is the best recorded kingdom up to the 8th century. Northumbria demonstrates in its history the consolidation of smaller kingdoms into larger polities, for it came about through the forced union of Bernicia, with its royal stronghold at Bamburgh, and Deira, centred on the old Roman city of York.

According to the surviving king lists, Bernicia was founded in 547 by Ida – hence the kings of Bernicia were called the Idings – when he captured Bamburgh. For half a century, the Idings fought desperately to retain their precarious hold on the coast, until an alliance of Brittonic kings drove them from Bamburgh on to Lindisfarne. On the point of extinction, the Idings were saved when one of the besieging kings took the opportunity to assassinate his rival. The siege dissolved into recrimination, the Idings escaped and re-established themselves on Bamburgh.

Soon after this, circa 593, Æthelfrith took the throne and proved to be one of the most successful warrior kings of the time, dealing a number of devastating defeats to the Britons and forcibly amalgamating the kingdom of Deira to Bernicia to create Northumbria. Under his leadership, Northumbria became the most powerful kingdom in Britain and, though Æthelfrith was killed in battle in 616, Edwin, the man who succeeded Æthelfrith, consolidated the kingdom's power and expanded its territory. Edwin also became the first northern Anglo-Saxon king to convert to Christianity, but before he could cement the new religion's place in his kingdom, Edwin too was killed in battle.

After a chaotic interregnum, Æthelfrith's son, Oswald, returned from exile to claim the throne. A devout Christian, Oswald brought monks from Iona to preach the new religion, who founded a monastery on Lindisfarne. Northumbrian power continued to expand under Oswald's brother and successor, Oswiu, and also during the reign of Oswiu's son, Ecgfrith. But, in 685, the Northumbrians suffered a catastrophic defeat at the hands of the Picts. Ecgfrith was killed and much of the Northumbrian army destroyed. The battle stopped further expansion north by the Northumbrians: the birth of Scotland can be traced back to this Pictish victory.

While Northumbria declined militarily after Nechtansmere, the 8th century saw a cultural flowering that produced, among many wonders, Bede's history and the *Lindisfarne Gospels*. The Viking invasion of the 9th century divided Northumbria again, with a Viking kingdom established at York but an English earldom retaining Bamburgh and Bernicia, cut off from the rest of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms until the unification of the country by Æthelstan the Glorious in the 10th century.

Mercia

The Mercians took their place in the heart of the country and fought to keep it

For nearly 300 years, Mercia was the most powerful of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. When Ecgfrith, king of the Northumbrians, was killed in 685, Mercia filled the power vacuum, coming to dominate the land south of the Humber, with only the kingdom of Wessex holding out against Mercian hegemony. But of the three major Anglo-Saxon kingdoms - Northumbria, Wessex and Mercia - the history of Mercia mostly comes from the pens of its enemies. Most notable among these is Bede, a proud Northumbrian, who despite the otherwise broad sweep of his *History*, treats the Mercians pretty well only as antagonists.

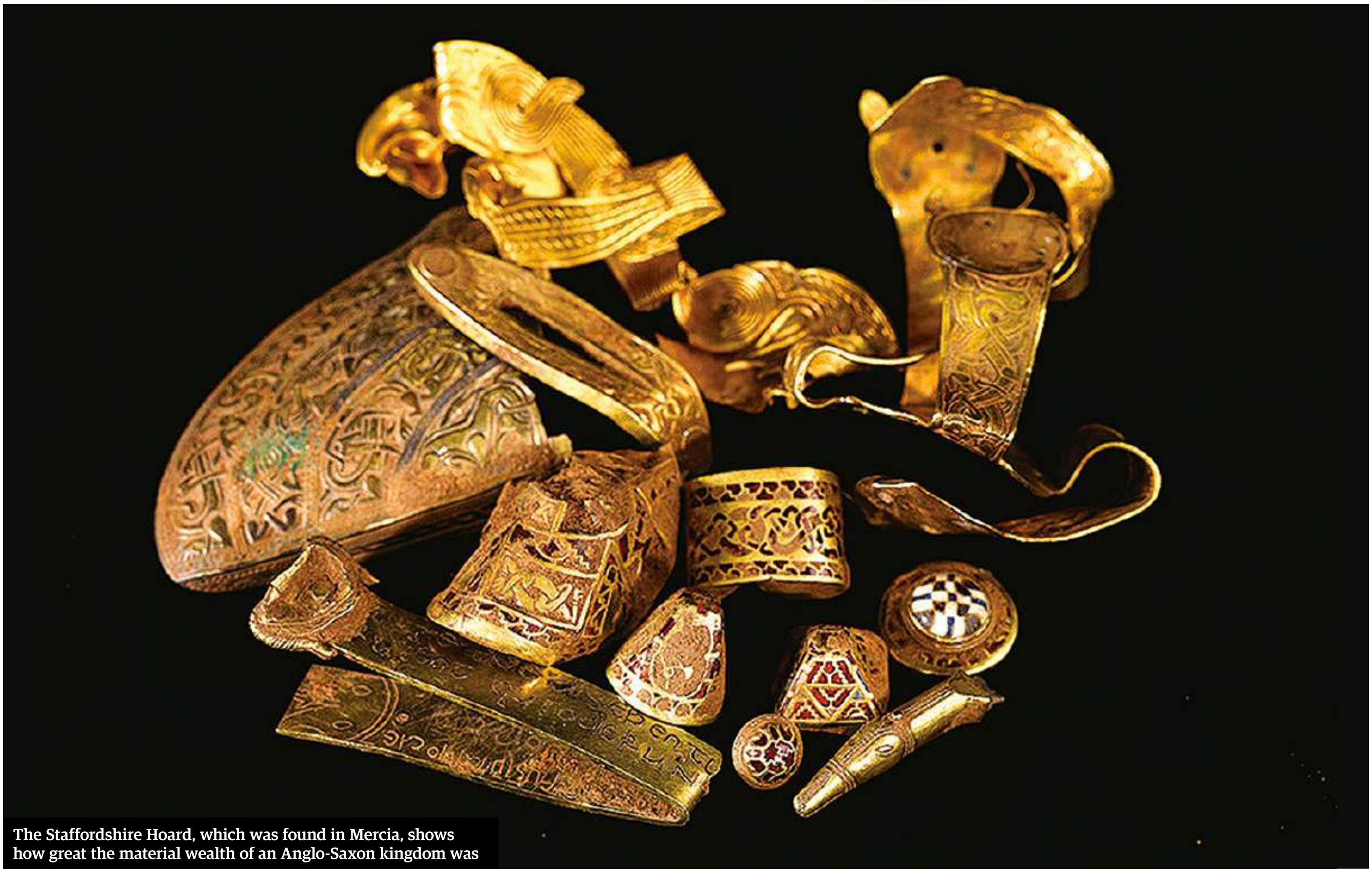
The name Mercia derives from Mierce, an Old English word meaning the 'marches' or 'border people', and that is what it was when first settled: the border kingdom between the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of the south and east and the Britonnic kingdoms of the west and north. These people settled in the Midlands, following the river valleys into the heart of the country. The king lists of the Mercians traced their lineage back to Icel, an Anglian prince who settled in Britain, giving the ruling family the name Iclingas.

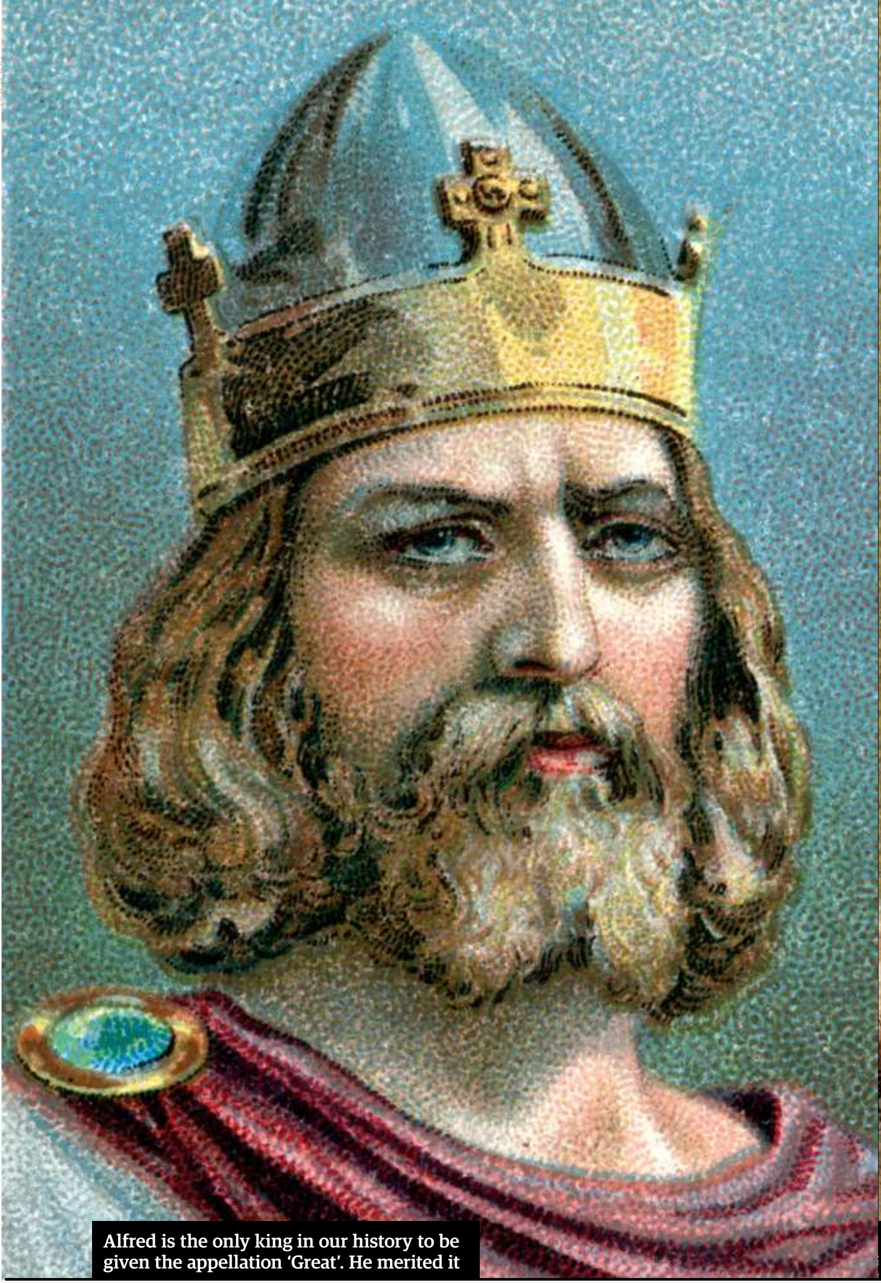
However, the first king to be reliably recorded is Penda, the great enemy of the kings of Northumbria, who killed two of them (Edwin and Oswald), as well as three kings of East Anglia. Penda was the last great pagan king of the Anglo-Saxons and when he fell in battle with Oswiu, Oswald's brother and successor as king of Northumbria, the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity was guaranteed.

Mercia and Northumbria continued to struggle for dominance until, with the death of King Ecgfrith in 685, Mercian supremacy was assured. It reached its height during the reign of King Offa in 757-96, when Mercian power encompassed the whole country and Offa could deal, almost as an equal, with no less a king than Charlemagne. The power Offa wielded is given earthen form in the vast labour required to build Offa's Dyke.

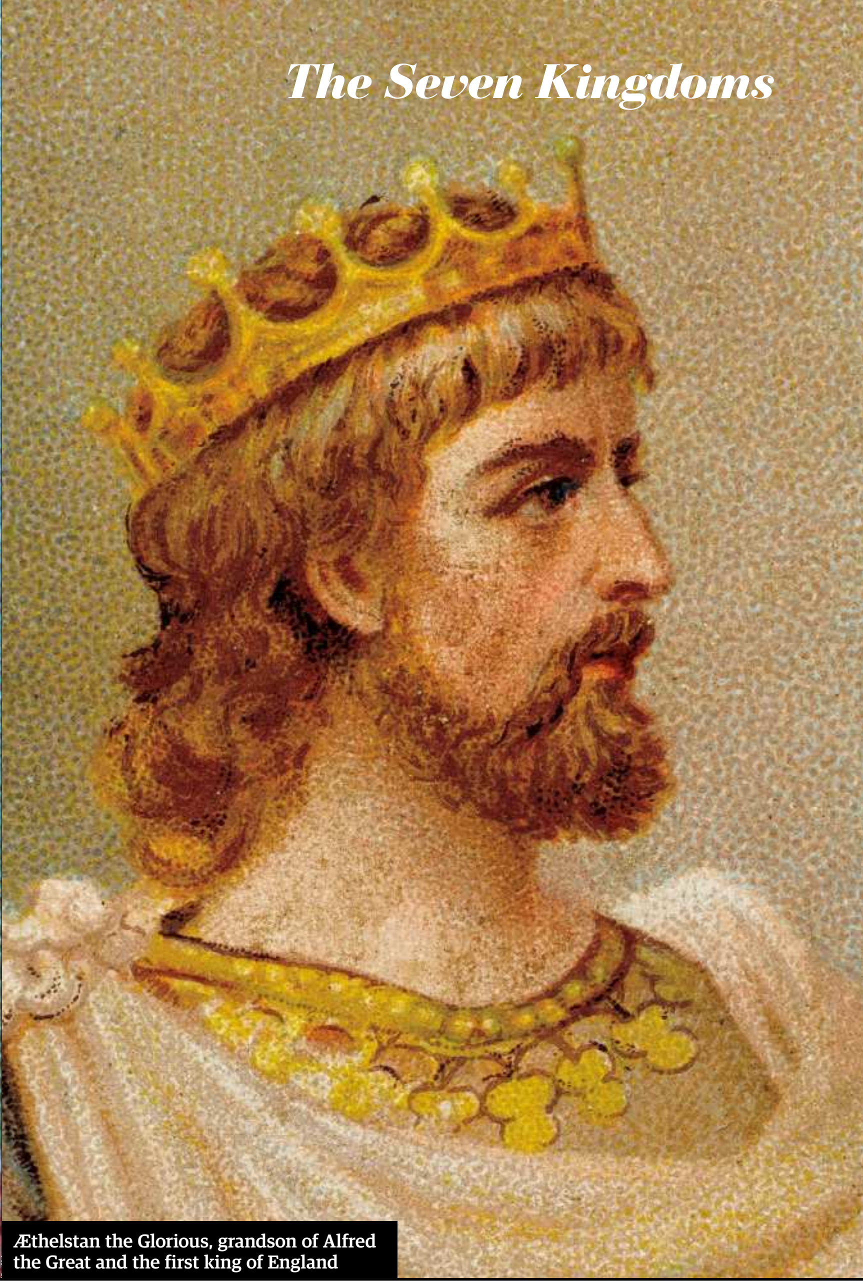
However, Mercian power declined after Offa's death and was dealt a terminal blow with the arrival of the Great Heathen Army in 868. The Vikings deposed Burgred, king of the Mercians, in 874 and installed a puppet king in his place. Following the victory of Alfred of Wessex over the Vikings, Mercia was divided, its northeast half becoming part of the Danelaw and its southwest portion being ruled by an alderman owing fealty to Alfred. Even following the reconquest of the Danelaw by Alfred's children and grandson, Mercia remained part of the expanding kingdom of the men came to see themselves as not just the kings of the West Saxons, but the kings of the English.

The vast labour involved in digging Offa's Dyke shows the manpower and organisation available to the kings of Mercia


The Staffordshire Hoard, which was found in Mercia, shows how great the material wealth of an Anglo-Saxon kingdom was



Alfred is the only king in our history to be given the appellation 'Great'. He merited it



Æthelstan the Glorious, grandson of Alfred the Great and the first king of England

Wessex

The last Anglo-Saxon kingdom became the first kingdom of England

Of the three major Anglo-Saxon kingdoms - Northumbria, Mercia and Wessex - the latter was the last to achieve prominence, but the kings of Wessex eventually became the rulers of a unified England. However, there was little to suggest their eventual status in the founding of Wessex.

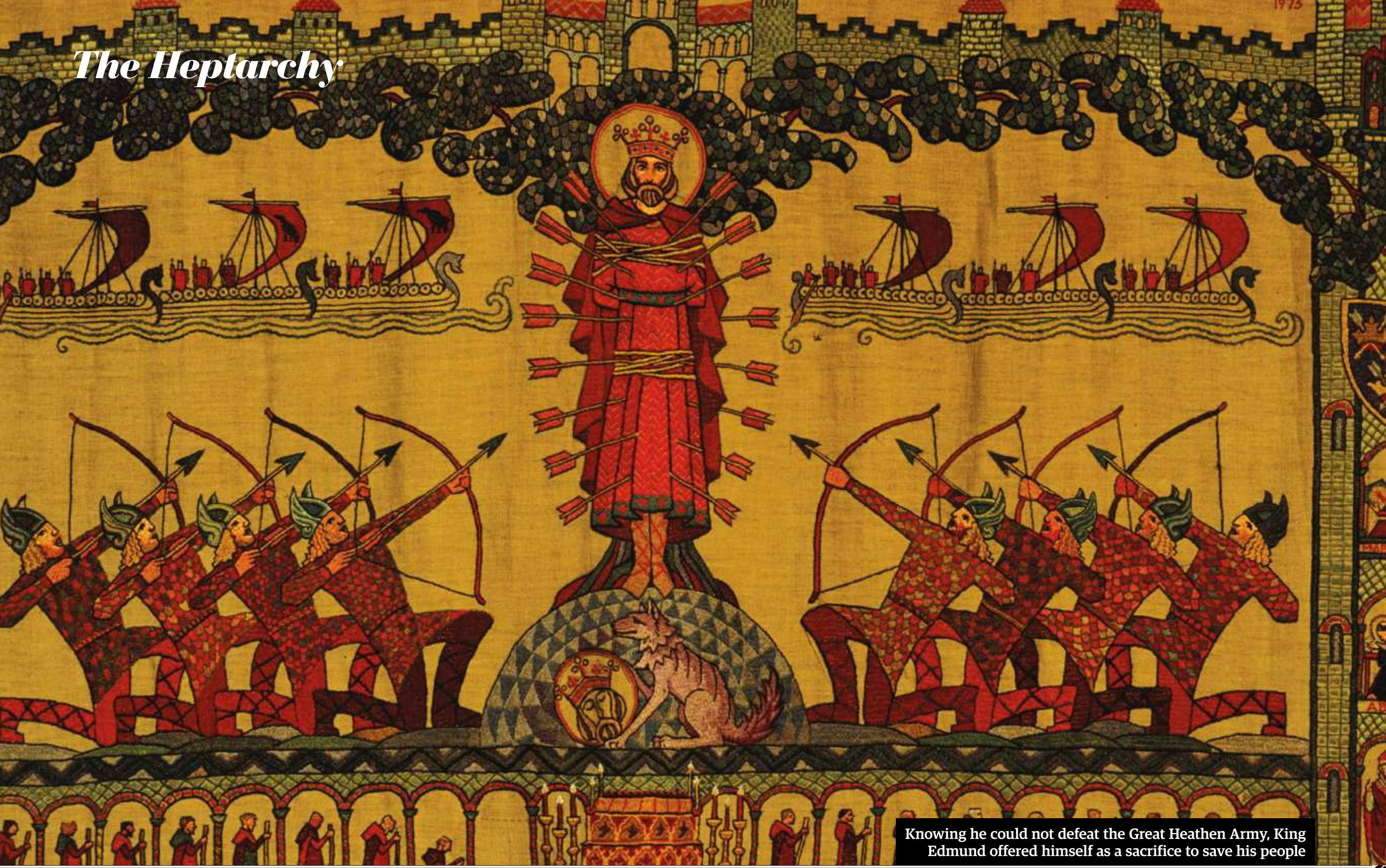
As with the other kingdoms, the king lists go back to a founder, Cerdic, from whom the ruling dynasty drew its legitimacy, but there is little to prove that the kings who came after Cerdic, the Cerdicings, were actually related to their supposed forebear. According to the account in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Cerdic landed on the Hampshire coast with five boatloads of men in 495 CE, establishing a kingdom on the south coast and gradually expanding inland and to the west. However, Cerdic is a Celtic name, not a Germanic one, so some scholars have speculated that the early rulers of Wessex were of Anglo/British stock.

Wessex expanded west, at the expense of the Britonnic kingdoms, while its northern expansion was checked by the increasing power of the Mercians: the River Thames marked the boundary between the two. During the 8th century, when Mercian supremacy was at its height, Wessex retained its independence to a greater degree than most other kingdoms, while its kings continued to push west, subjugating the Britonnic kingdom of Dumnonia (Devon) by early in the 9th century.

In 851, a Viking army landed in Wessex but was decisively defeated at the Battle of Aclea. So when the Vikings returned in 865, the Great Heathen Army avoided the kingdom of the West Saxons. It was only when the other three major Anglo-Saxon kingdoms had been subdued that the Great Army turned its attention to Wessex, the last kingdom. Sitting uncomfortably on its throne was a young man named Æthelred, who proved far more ready than his infamous descendant, with his younger brother, Alfred, as his chief commander. At the Battle of Ashdown in 871, Æthelred and Alfred inflicted the first significant defeat on the Great Army and the Northmen withdrew.

But Æthelred did not long survive the victory, which left his young brother, Alfred, the last king of the Anglo-Saxons. There were no other viable claimants. Remove Alfred, and the last kingdom would fall. Which was precisely what the Danes attempted, launching a mid-winter raid into Wessex that caught Alfred completely by surprise. Fleeing into the marshes of the Somerset Levels with a handful of men, Alfred left the Vikings in control of the last kingdom.

But Alfred returned, defeated the Danes at the Battle of Edington, one of the most crucial battles in English history, and set about remaking his kingdom to first withstand and then reconquer the country. Under the remarkable leadership of Alfred's son and daughter, Edward and Æthelflæd, who became the effective ruler of Mercia, the Danelaw was reconquered and it was Æthelstan, Alfred's grandson, who united England under his leadership. The king of the West Saxons was now the king of England. It was an extraordinary achievement by an extraordinary family.



Knowing he could not defeat the Great Heathen Army, King Edmund offered himself as a sacrifice to save his people

The Kingdom of the East Angles

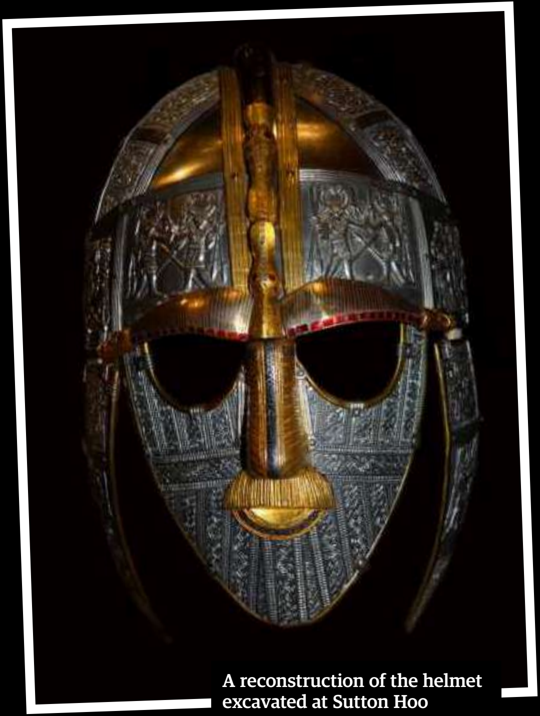
The riches of Sutton Hoo show the wealth of an Anglo-Saxon kingdom

On 14 June 1939, light broke into the darkness that had shrouded the so-called Dark Ages for centuries. For on that day, archaeologist Basil Brown opened the burial chamber of the great ship burial at Sutton Hoo. Over the next few weeks, archaeologists discovered the extraordinary riches that a Dark Age king could command. That king was probably Rædwald, the first king of the East Angles of whom we know anything more than a name.

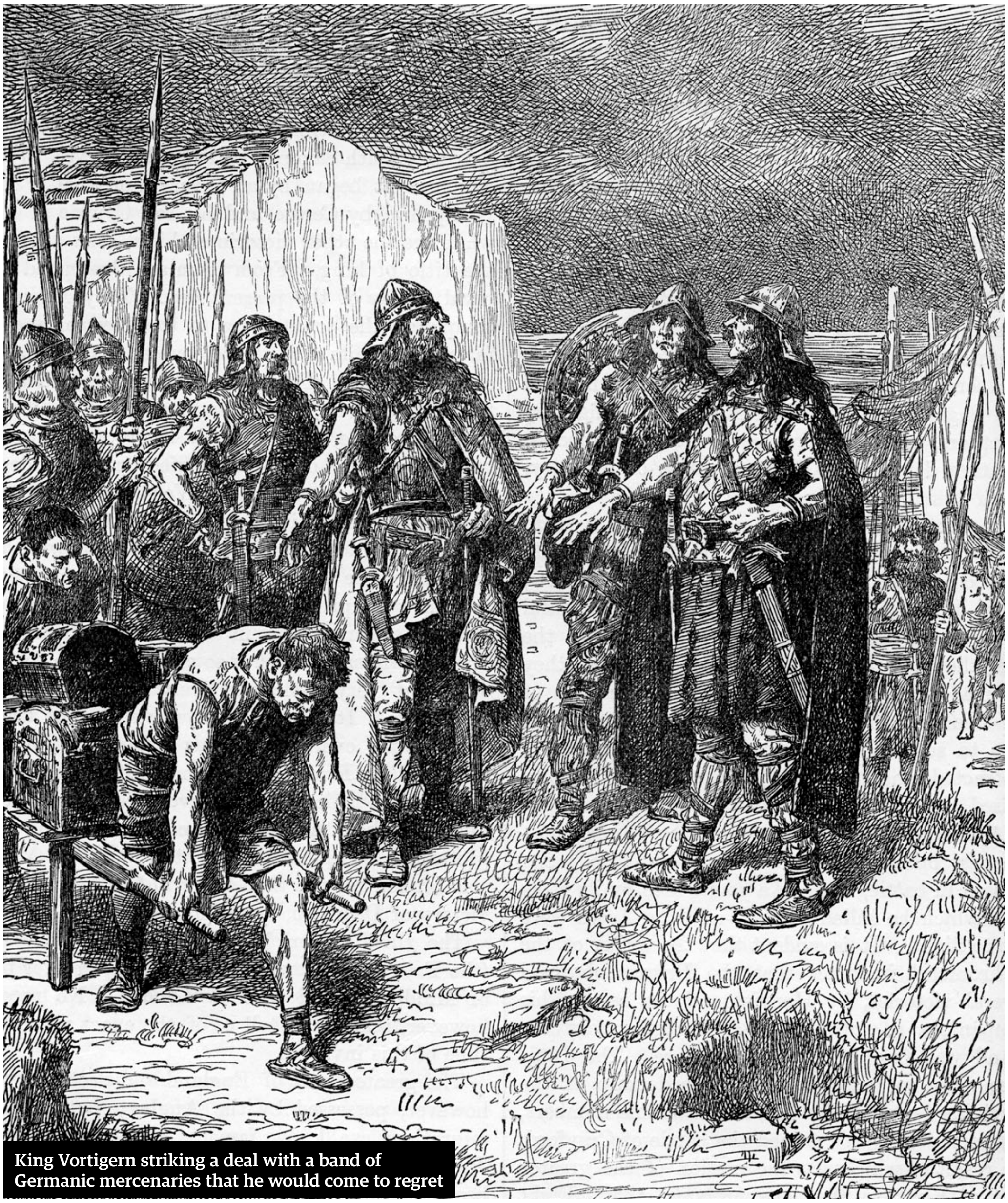
The people who settled in the land almost cut off from the rest of country by the Fens were Angles, split into the North Folk and the South Folk (names that continue as Norfolk and Suffolk), and the kings of the Angles traced their lineage back to one Wuffa, making them Wuffingas ('sons of the Wolf'). Rædwald became king of the East Angles in the early 7th century as the power of Æthelfrith of Northumbria was steadily growing. However, the two kingdoms were separated by the Fens and the kingdom of Lindsey (another Anglo-Saxon kingdom roughly corresponding to Lincolnshire, that is not numbered among the Heptarchy although it probably should have been), so Rædwald was happy to give sanctuary to a fugitive Northumbrian prince, Edwin.

But when Æthelfrith learned Edwin had taken shelter with Rædwald he sent a series of messengers, bearing increasingly explicit threats, demanding Edwin's head. Rædwald vacillated, then decided to fight. With Edwin, he defeated and killed Æthelfrith, installing Edwin on the throne of Northumbria and becoming himself Bretwalda, the pre-eminent king in Britain, until his death circa 626. His successors fought a series of campaigns to retain their independence from the rising power of Mercia, campaigns that usually ended with the East Anglians having to find a new king. The East Anglians continued to kick against Mercia throughout the 8th century and managed to regain independence in the 9th century, only to be conquered by the Great Heathen Army in 869.

The last independent king of the East Angles was Edmund the Martyr, venerated after his death by the newly Christian children of the Vikings who had killed him. These Christian Vikings, who had settled in East Anglia, created the shrine of Bury St Edmunds to commemorate an Anglo-Saxon king.



A reconstruction of the helmet excavated at Sutton Hoo



King Vortigern striking a deal with a band of Germanic mercenaries that he would come to regret

The Kingdom of Kent

This was where, according to tradition, the first kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons was established

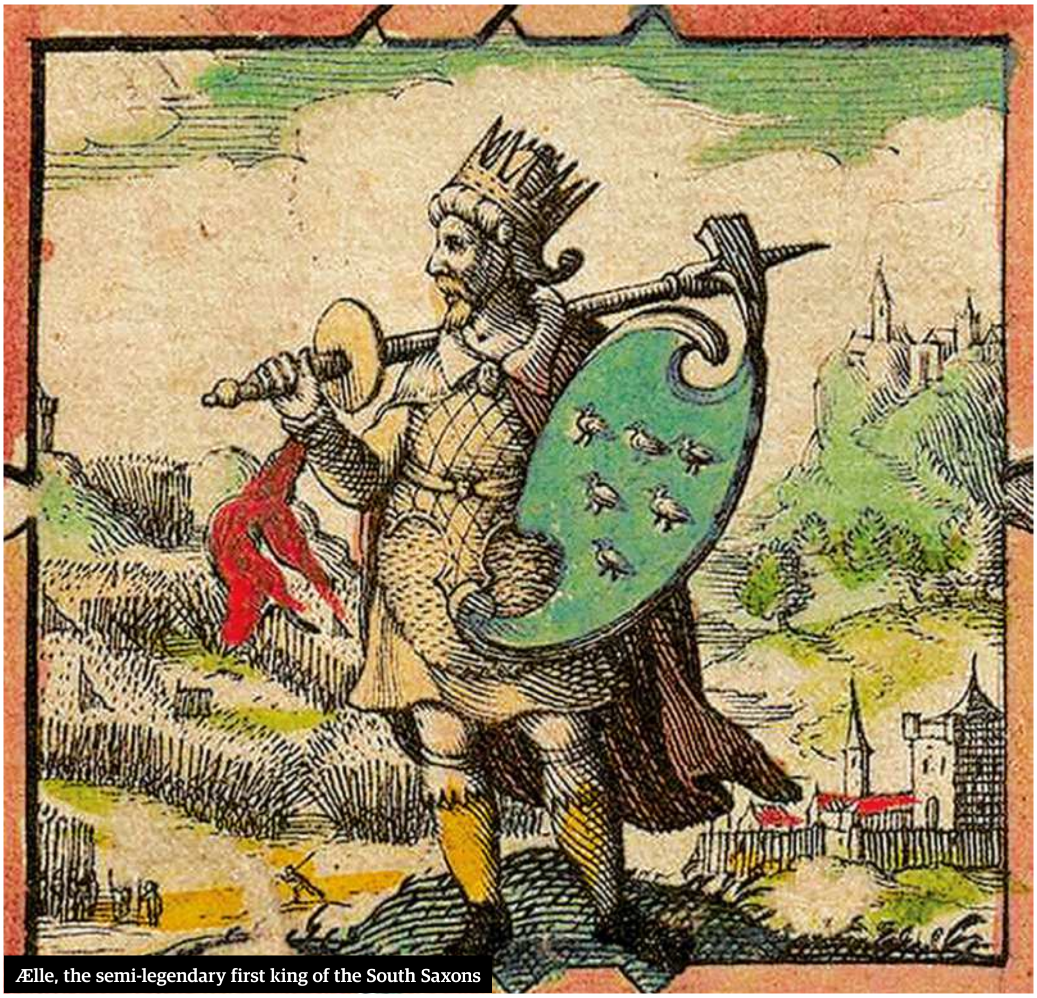
The kings of Kent were not Angles or Saxons - they were actually Jutes, from the north of the Jutland Peninsula. The social organisation of Kent was significantly different from those of the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, with only one class of noble as opposed to the two in other kingdoms, while Kentish peasants (ceorls) were also more important than those in the other kingdoms.

According to tradition, the first kings of Kent were the brothers Hengist and Horsa, mercenaries for hire who were invited to Britain by Vortigern to fight against the Picts raiding down the east coast following the collapse of Roman power. In the declining years of the Western Roman Empire it was not at all unusual for barbarian mercenaries to be hired to fight barbarian raiders, so there's nothing intrinsically unlikely about the tale. It was, however, later embroidered to include details such as Vortigern becoming infatuated with Hengist's daughter Rowena and signing over Kent to her father in return for the daughter.

It's only with the long reign of King Æthelberht that historical evidence for the kingdom emerges. The kings of Kent maintained close relations with the Merovingian kings across the Channel, trading widely with them and, as a result, having greater wealth at their disposal than the other kings in Britain. It was this wealth that gave Æthelberht the political clout to be regarded as Bretwalda and it enabled his marriage to a Frankish princess, Bertha. Bertha was Christian, however, and the marriage was contracted on the basis that she would be allowed to remain so.

In 599, Æthelberht received a mission of Italians, coming all the way from Rome, that was led by a monk called Augustine who had been dispatched by the pope to convert the pagan Anglo-Saxons. Æthelberht accepted the new religion, and installed Augustine at Canterbury, making the church there the mother church of the country. Kentish dominance did not survive Æthelberht, though, and while the kingdom remained rich, there was savage internecine strife in the ruling family. Thus weakened, in the latter part of the 7th century Kent came under the domination of Mercia, which continued off and on until the rise of the West Saxons in the early 9th century, when the kingdom became part of Wessex. As such, Kent played a key part in Alfred's struggle against the Vikings, coming to the fore in the Viking attacks during the 890s, the last decade of Alfred's reign, when the threat of the Northmen was broken for a century.

Æthelberht, king of Kent from c.589 to 616 CE



Ælle, the semi-legendary first king of the South Saxons

Sussex

Sandwiched between Kent and Wessex, with Mercia bearing down from the north, Sussex struggled to survive

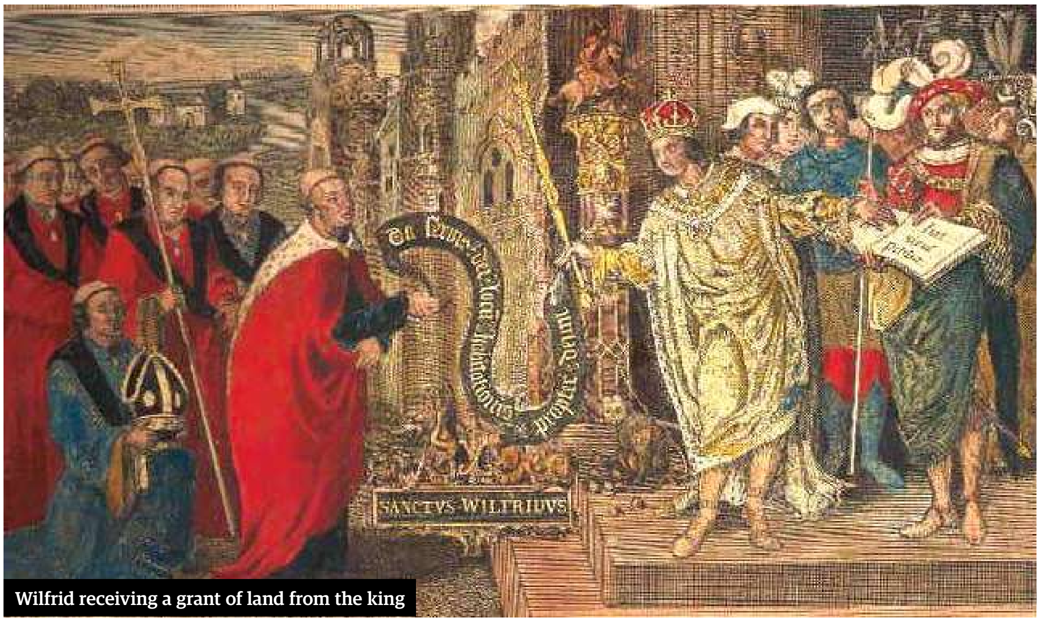
Although included among the Heptarchy, the history of the Kingdom of the South Saxons is obscure and its status more a product of being included in the list of main Anglo-Saxon kingdoms produced by the 12th-century historian Henry of Huntingdon than any real claim to eminence among the kingdoms of the Anglo-Saxons. However, despite its perilous position between Kent and Wessex, with Mercia threatening from the north, the kingdom of Sussex retained its independence longer than other similarly sized kingdoms, such as Lindsey, only finally submitting to the rule of the kings of Wessex in 827.

According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the kingdom was founded by Ælle in 477 CE when he landed with his three sons and three boatloads of warriors near Selsey. The kingdom followed the pattern of gradual expansion against Britonnic resistance, although the archaeology of the area suggests that Saxons had settled in Sussex before Ælle's arrival, possibly originally coming as paid mercenaries in the service of the Roman Empire to man the forts of the Saxon Shore. This was a series of strongholds and ports that the Romans established to guard against barbarian raiders.

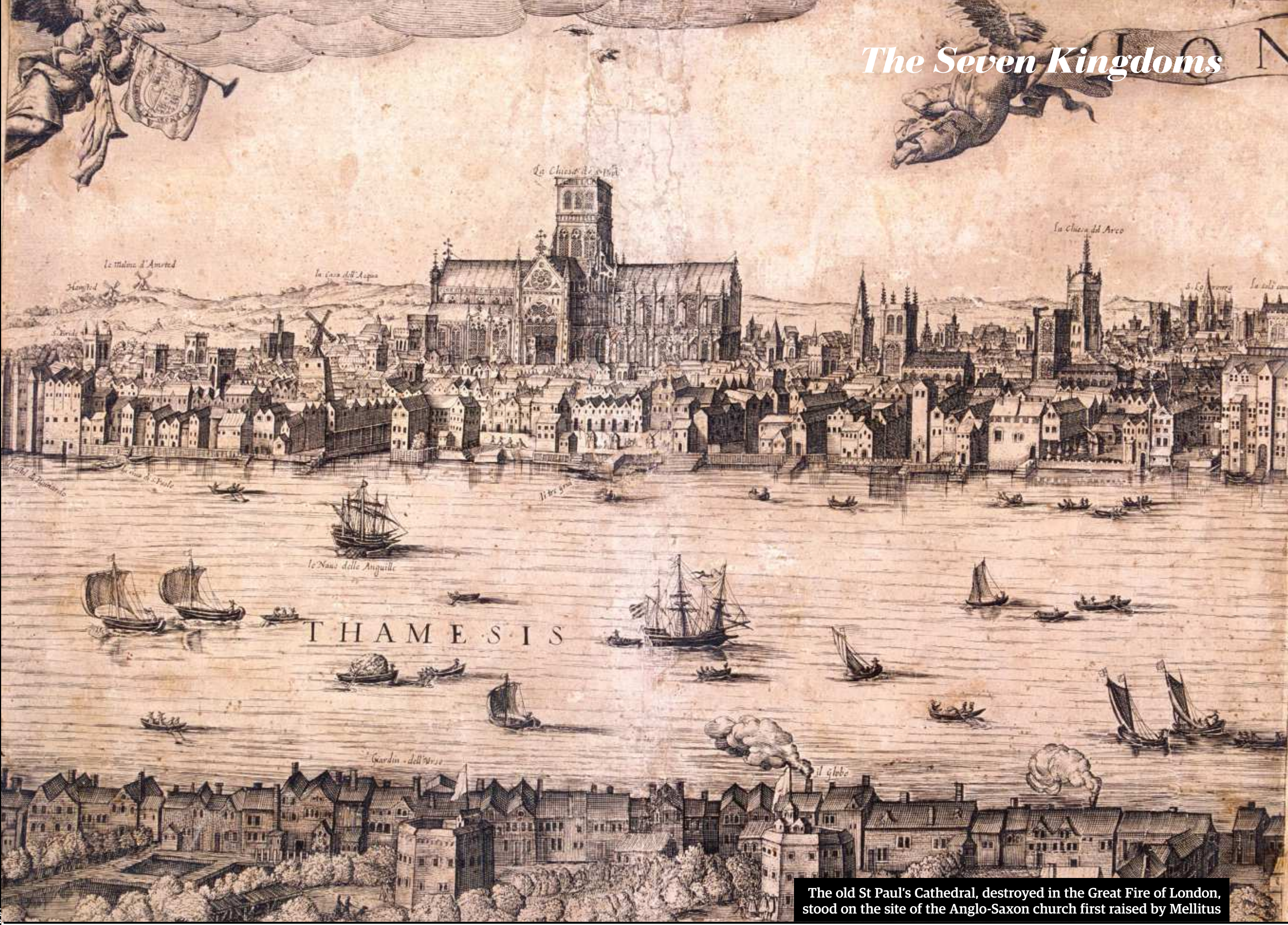
The kingdom comes briefly into the light of history in the second half of the 7th century, when the baptism of its king Æthelwealh is recorded. Æthelwealh's sponsor and godfather was Wulfhere, the king of Mercia, and as a baptismal gift, Wulfhere gave Æthelwealh the Isle of Wight and the Meon Valley. Standing as godfather to another king was both an act of spiritual brotherhood and political mastery – a mastery emphasised by Wulfhere's giving of land as gift: Æthelwealh was very much the junior of the two monarchs.

> "As a baptismal gift, Wulfhere gave Æthelwealh the Isle of Wight and the Meon Valley"

However, although Æthelwealh had become a Christian, his people had not. Their conversion, the last of the major Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, waited upon the rain. Wilfrid, the most tumultuous of Northumbrian bishops, had been deposed from his throne by King Ecgfrith and exiled to Sussex. Arriving in the midst of a severe drought, Wilfrid brought the rain. The South Saxons, abandoned by their gods, accepted Wilfrid's offer of a new god, an offer Wilfrid sweetened by throwing in lessons on new methods of fishing that helped alleviate the effects of the famine the drought had brought. Sussex became a client kingdom to Mercia in the 8th century when Offa was supreme, but by 825 it had been subsumed into the kingdom of Wessex.



Wilfrid receiving a grant of land from the king



The old St Paul's Cathedral, destroyed in the Great Fire of London, stood on the site of the Anglo-Saxon church first raised by Mellitus

Essex

The kingdom of the East Saxons spread through Hertfordshire and included the land of the Middle Saxons (Middlesex)

The history of the kingdom of the East Saxons is as obscure as that of the South Saxons. Its origins probably lie in the 6th century, when Saxons settled in the flat lands north of the Thames. However, even the king lists for the East Saxons are late, from the 9th century, with some disagreement about the dynasty's founder. Kings Æscwine and Sledd are separately credited as the first king in different genealogies, although the one listing Æscwine first works Sledd in as his son and successor.

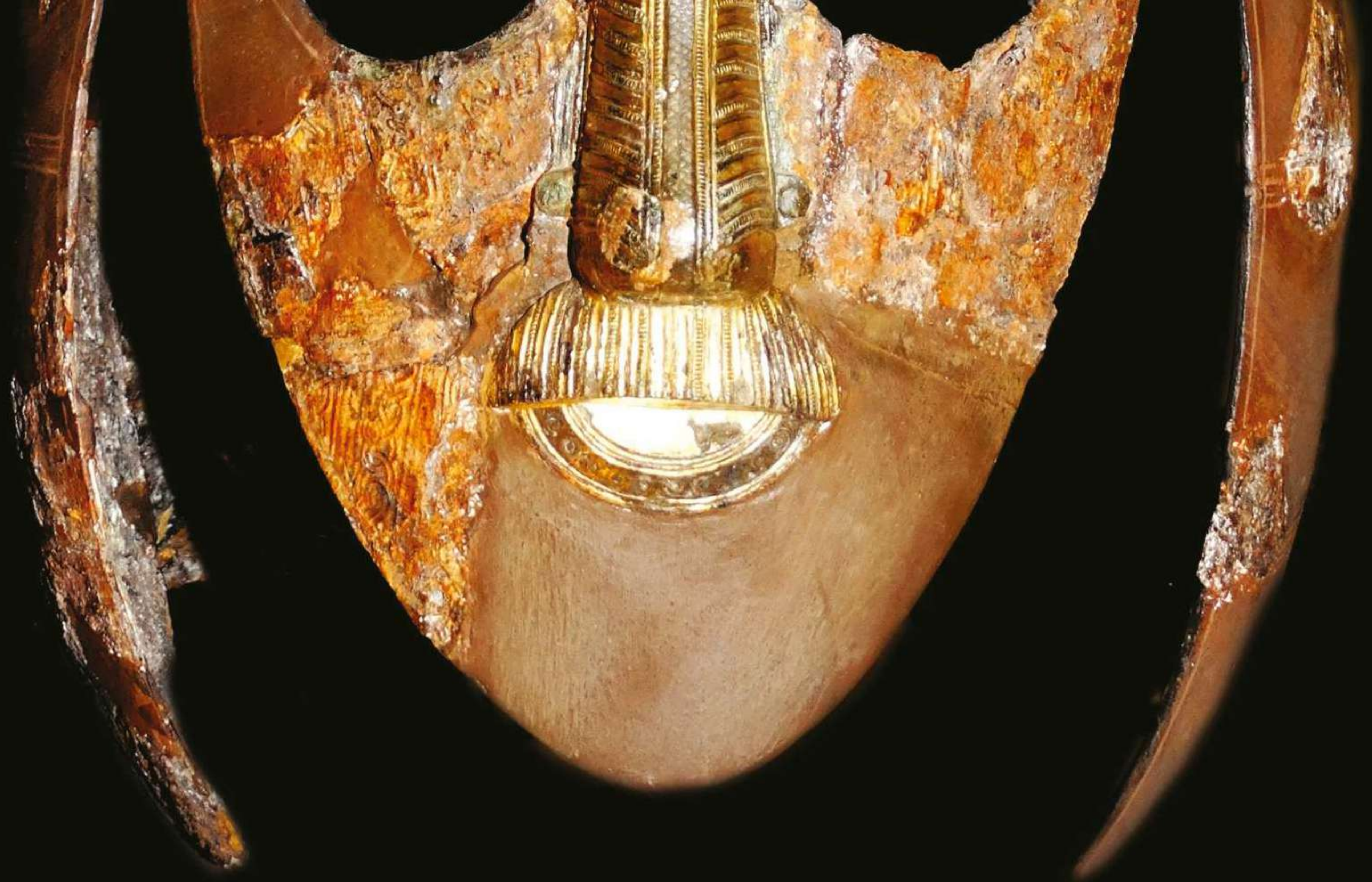
The kingdom grew by agglomerating small tribal groups, eventually encompassing the modern county of Essex as well as parts of Hertfordshire and the now lost county of Middlesex. London was under the control of the kings of the East Saxons in the 7th century, when the first attested king is recorded. His name was Sæberht and in 604 he was baptised, with King Æthelberht of Kent standing as his godfather.

Pope Gregory's initial plan had been that Britain should have two metropolitan sees, in London and York, corresponding to the administrative centres of the old Roman province. However, having established his bishopric in Canterbury under the protection and sponsorship of Æthelberht of Kent, Augustine could not move to London. He did, however, send Mellitus to London as its bishop, where he founded the first St Paul's on the site of the present cathedral. However, when Sæberht died, his three sons, who had remained pagan, expelled Mellitus, apparently over his refusal to give them communion without their first being baptised, and the bishopric lapsed. The conversion of the kings of the East Saxons continued back and forth over the next generation, with another pagan succeeding the three brothers after their death in battle. Then followed King Sigeberht II, who converted to Christianity under the influence of King Oswiu of Northumbria, only to be murdered by two brothers who disapproved of the novel approach King Sigeberht was taking to rule: he was forgiving his enemies rather than going the usual route of killing them.

In the 8th century, Essex fell under the control of Mercia, then was subsumed into the kingdom of Wessex in 825, only to become part of the Danelaw as part of the treaty signed between Alfred and Guthrum. Essex was conquered by Edward the Elder, Alfred the Great's son, in 917, and duly became part of Wessex as that kingdom expanded towards becoming a newly unified country: England.

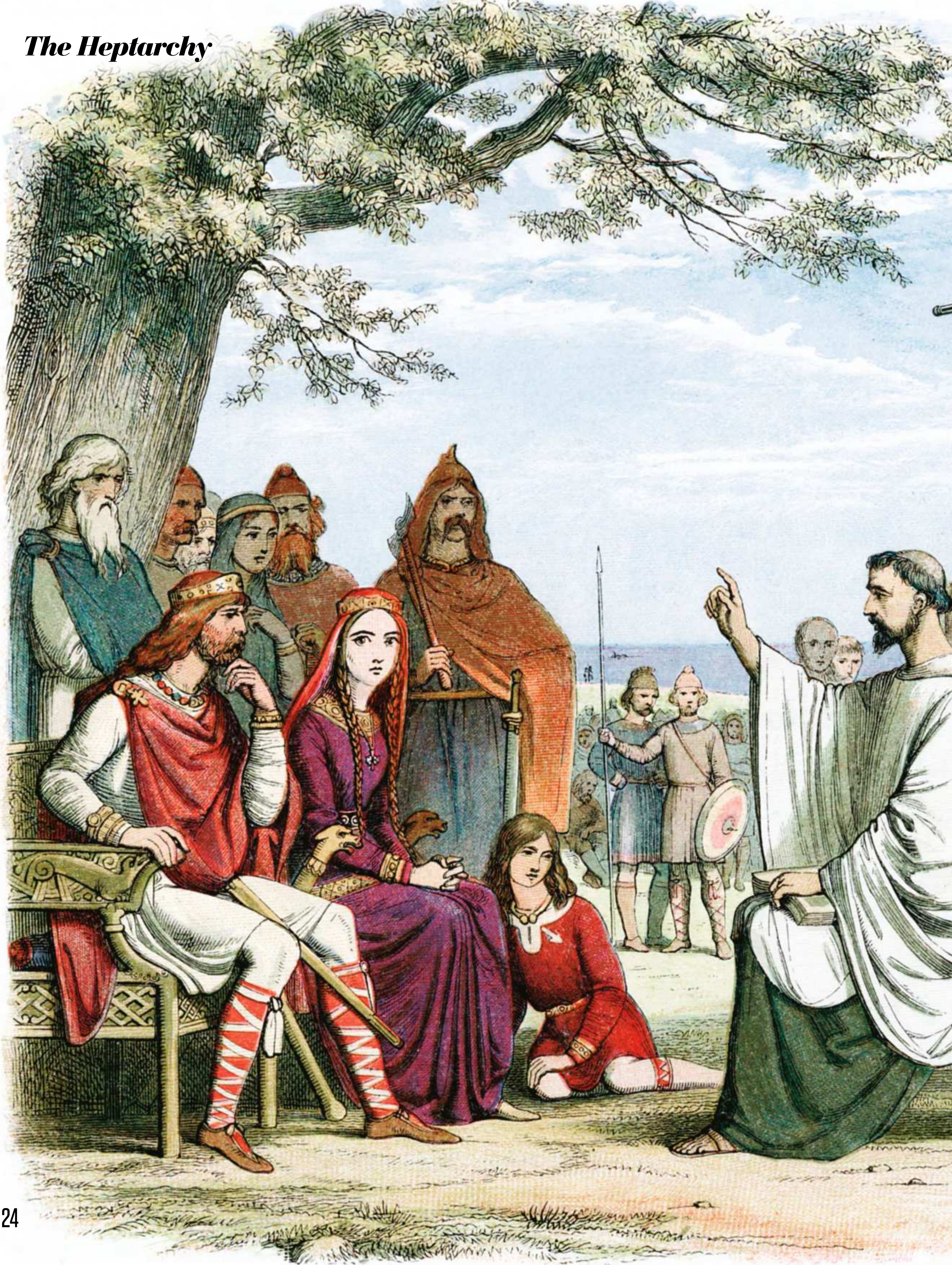
Mellitus
1st Bishop of London
604
3rd Archbishop of Canterbury
619-624
d.624

A stone in St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury, marking the grave of Mellitus, first bishop of London



Sutton Hoo

When the Anglo-Saxon hoard at Sutton Hoo was discovered in 1939, it was unlike anything England had seen before. During the excavations in Suffolk, the remains of a 30-metre-long oak ship were found – the largest Anglo-Scandinavian ship that has been found in England – and in the centre was a burial chamber, housing weapons, armour (including the pictured helmet), coins, drinking horns, silver vessels and a lyre, among countless other items. Each piece was of the highest quality material and workmanship, indicating that this was the burial site of a king – but no one knows whose final resting place this is.



NEW GOD FOR OLD

In the clash between religions, battle provided the answer as to which god to worship

Written by **Edoardo Albert**

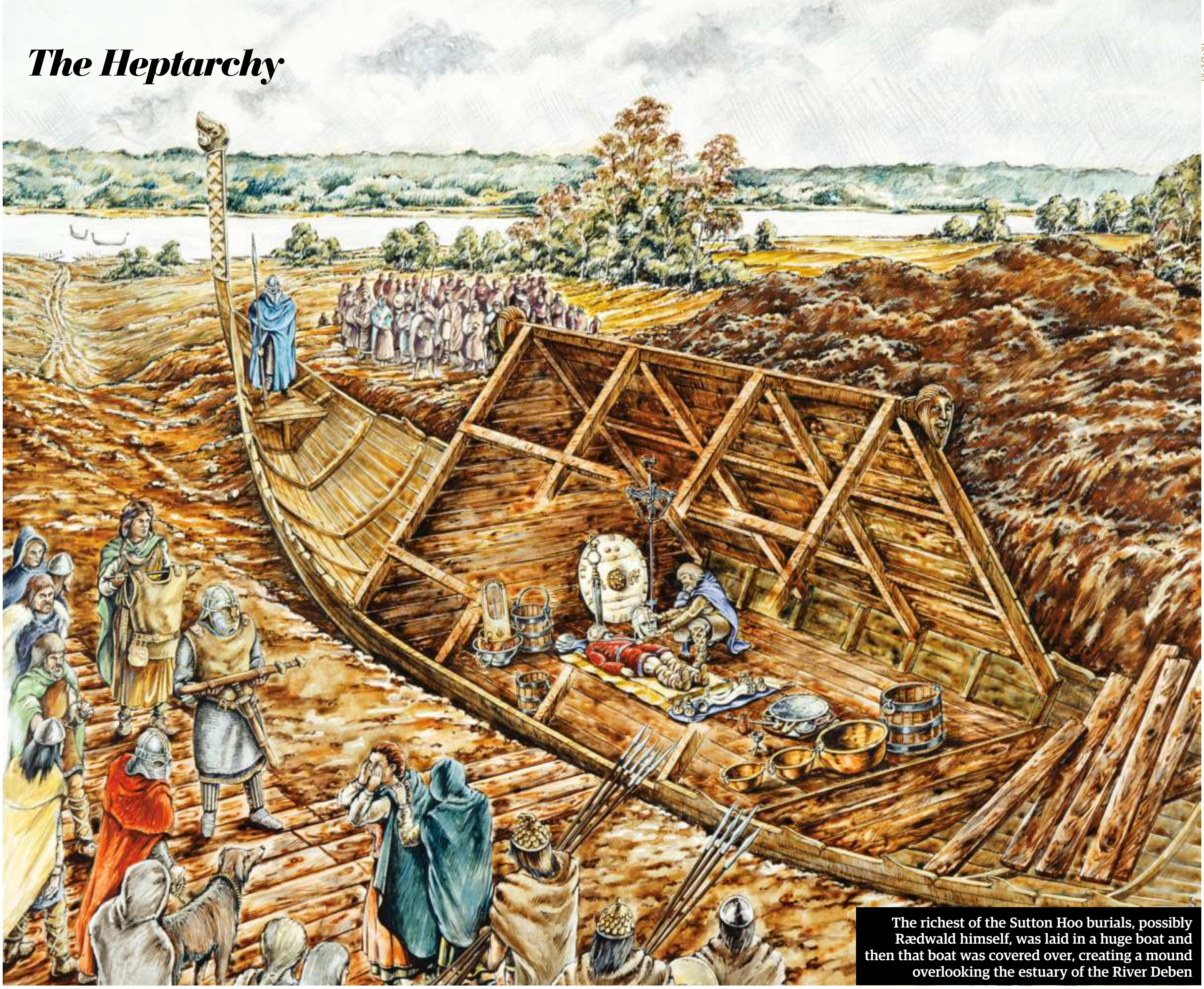
It was 597 and a group of 40 Italians stood shivering on the Isle of Thanet, in the furthest southeast corner of Kent. They were waiting for the king of Kent, a barbarian with the uncouth name of Æthelberht, and they really didn't want to be there. They had been dispatched from Rome the year before because the pope, Gregory, had developed the mad notion of sending a mission out beyond the ends of the world to convert the pagan Anglo-Saxons to Christianity and all because, so he said, he had seen a group of fair-haired Anglo-Saxon youths for sale in Rome's market and, seeing them, had asked of what people they came from. On being told they were Angles, Gregory had remarked, "Non Angli, sed angeli" ("Not Angles but angels") and promptly conceived the idea of sending a mission to bring them out of darkness.

And who better to make up the mission than monks from Gregory's own monastery of Saint Andrew on the Caelian Hill in Rome, and who better to lead it than his own dear friend, Augustine. As Augustine wrapped his cloak even tighter against the wind and stood on the chalk uprising that formed the Isle of Thanet, looking down to the broad expanse of the Wantsum Channel and the boat making its way across the waters, he thought again that, with a friend like Gregory, what need had he of enemies? To get to this benighted corner of the world that had been cut off from the light of civilisation for nearly two centuries, he and his companions had had to risk their lives crossing the unruly waters of the Great Ocean, so different from the warm blue of the Mediterranean, only to be told to wait on this wind-blasted promontory until the king of what passed for a kingdom on this island could come to meet them. At least King Æthelberht, although a pagan, was married to a Christian. His wife, Bertha, was a Frank, great-granddaughter of Clovis, the first Merovingian king. Another barbarian, but at least a half-civilised one.

The royal boat drew up on the strand and the king got out with his entourage of warriors and, Augustine was glad to see, his queen too, with her chaplain Liudhard. A condition of the marriage contract had been that Bertha could continue to practice her religion after marrying Æthelberht and she had brought a Frankish priest to Kent as part of her household that she might continue to have access to the sacraments.

The king's reeve, who had met them when they landed on the isle, had told them to wait on the king's pleasure but while waiting for Æthelberht to arrive they had learned that the king feared meeting this group of monks from far away under a roof lest they cast a spell upon him. Apparently the open air was safer so far as magic was concerned. So, with his cloak wrapped tight round his shoulders – did the wind never stop in this country? – Augustine waited on the king's arrival.

And so Christianity returned to England after its extirpation following the arrival of the Anglo-



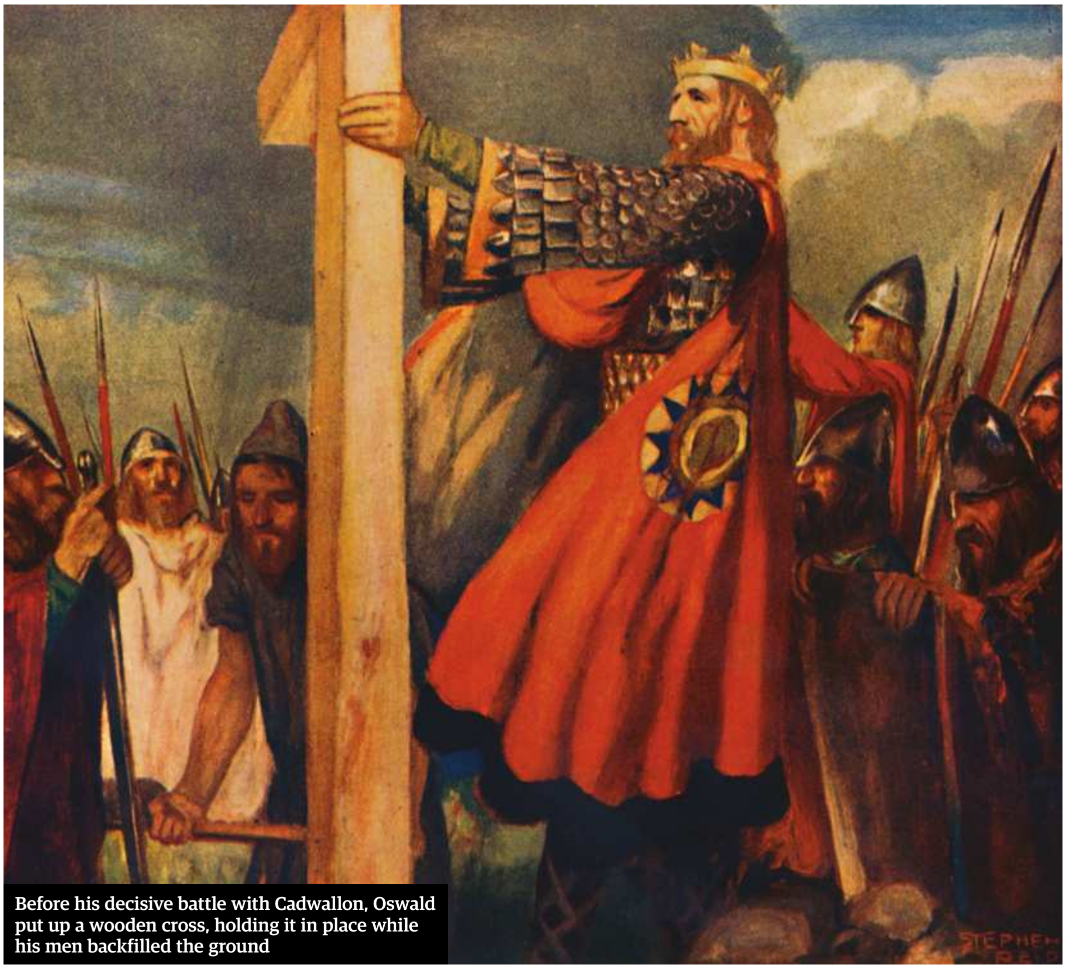
The richest of the Sutton Hoo burials, possibly Rædwald himself, was laid in a huge boat and then that boat was covered over, creating a mound overlooking the estuary of the River Deben

Saxons. At least, that's how Bede tells it in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. We now know it wasn't quite like that, but Bede was writing more than a century after these events and, without him, we would know almost nothing about what happened in Britain in the years after 410 CE and the withdrawal of the Roman legions.

In the 5th and 6th centuries, the east and central regions of Britain had been settled by pagan peoples of Germanic origin: the Angles, Saxons and Jutes (with other tribes, such as the Frisians, also likely arriving). The culture and people they displaced were Romano-Celtic and Christian. According to Bede, these Christian Britons were displaced by the incoming Anglo-Saxons and, during the centuries of conflict between the ethnic groups, the Britons made no effort to share their Christianity with the Anglo-Saxons. It's now clear that both of these are exaggerations. While in some areas, particularly in the east, the native Britons were clearly displaced, in other areas there is evidence for settlements of Britons and Anglo-Saxons existing in fairly close proximity, although with considerable barriers existing between the two communities and little mixing: think of Northern Ireland during the Troubles. In these cases, though, warbands of Anglo-Saxons often displaced the Britonnic rulers, thereby imposing their language and culture on the villages and hamlets under their rule. Similarly, while there is some evidence that Britons under pagan Anglo-Saxon rule in some places retained their faith, there was little incentive for the new rulers to adopt the religion of the people whom they had defeated. This was an age when warriors were above all pragmatic in their religious choices: they worshipped the gods that could provide them with victory on the battlefield.

"Through his marriage to Bertha, Æthelberht had access to more and better bling than any other king in Britain"

But for Æthelberht, king of Kent, there was a different consideration. He was regarded as Bretwalda, a term that has produced reams of scholarly debate but one that certainly meant a pre-eminence over the other kings and kingdoms in Britain. Usually a Bretwalda owed his dominance to success on the battlefield, but there is surprisingly little evidence for Æthelberht's military domination, although given his exceptionally long reign (possibly over 50 years) he must have been more than able to hold his place in the shieldwall. What really gave Kent its pre-eminent place under Æthelberht was its links to the kingdom of the Franks across the Channel – links that were cemented by Æthelberht's marriage to Bertha, his Frankish princess. Marriage into the Merovingian dynasty brought Æthelberht both great prestige – the Merovingian kings at the time ruled over a vast area when compared with the petty kingdoms of Britain – and access to the continental trading networks and the high-value goods that brought prominence to barbarian kings. Essentially, a king attracted warriors to his court by giving them bling: gold arm rings were most favoured in the songs of the scops, the poets and singers who were the public memory and propagandists for the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, but any shiny gold treasure would attract glory hound warriors to a king's court. Through his marriage to Bertha, Æthelberht had access to more and better bling than any other king


Before his decisive battle with Cadwallon, Oswald put up a wooden cross, holding it in place while his men backfilled the ground

Æthelberht, king of Kent, sculpted on the exterior of Canterbury Cathedral

in Britain, and he used these treasures to secure an unprecedented half-century in power and his status as Bretwalda.

So it was vital for Augustine to convert the king. While it would be overstating it to say that as the king prayed, so did his kingdom – after all, the king had to keep the support of the witan, the assembly of the most important men in the kingdom – having the foremost king in Britain adopt Christianity would be a huge step towards the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons. After Æthelberht's initial wariness, as manifest in his decision to meet Augustine away from any structures, the king, under the influence of his queen, accepted the new religion fairly quickly and, by 601, was baptised. Æthelberht gave his support to the new religion, installing Augustine and his companions in two churches that dated from the Roman era, St Martin's and Christchurch. With Æthelberht's support, Augustine's mission made rapid progress, converting the king of the East Saxons in 604 and shortly afterwards Rædwald, the king of the East Angles, who adopted a rather à la carte approach to religion, keeping altars to both the new god, Christ, and the old gods in his sanctuary.

But in 616, Æthelberht died. His queen, Bertha, had predeceased him and he had married again, taking a member of the local nobility for his new wife. When Æthelberht died, his son, Eadbald, married Æthelberht's widow in an effort to shore

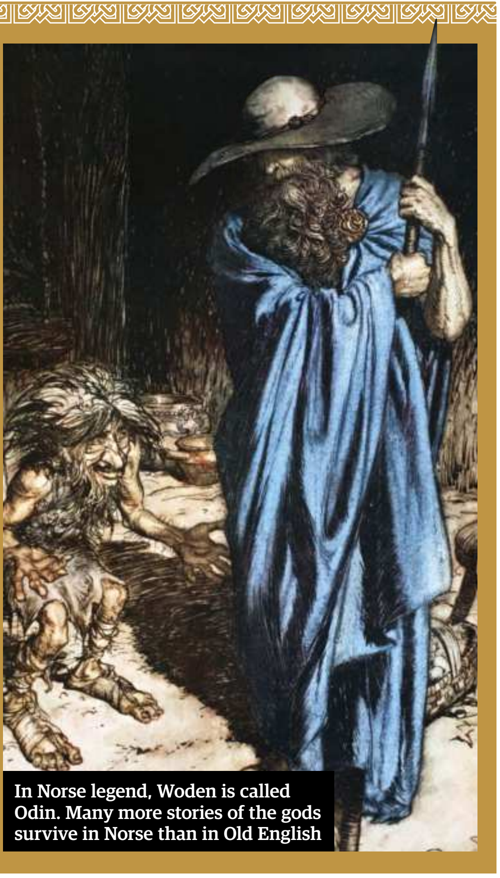
The old gods

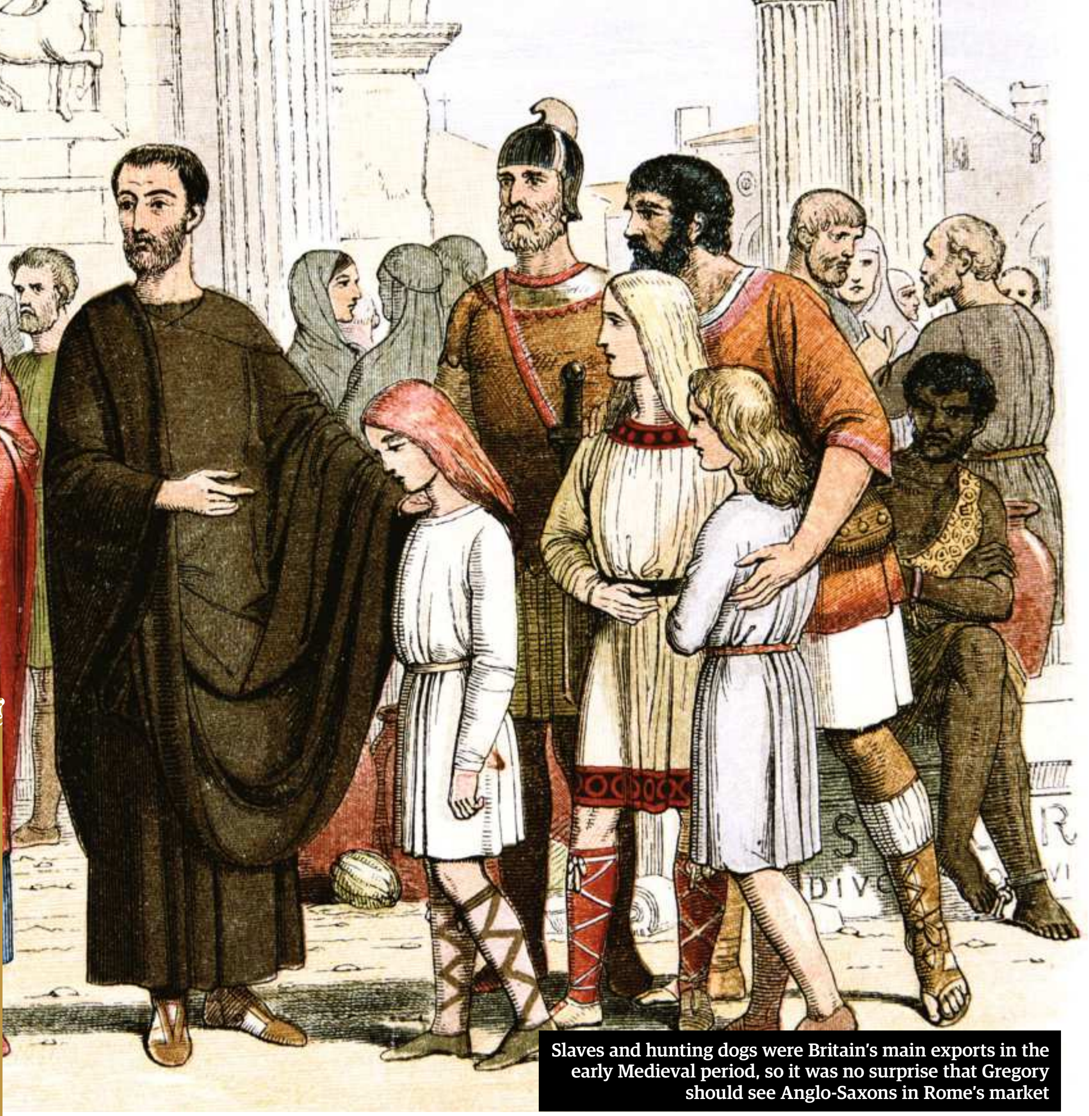
What we know of Anglo-Saxon paganism

Before their conversion, the Anglo-Saxons had no written language, so we know little about Anglo-Saxon paganism. Yes, they worshipped the Germanic gods, the names of Tiu (Tuesday), Woden (Wednesday), Thunor (Thursday) and Freia (Friday) being preserved in four days of the week while Easter keeps alive the memory of a goddess, Eostre, whose cult is otherwise completely lost, but the tales they told of these gods are lost and we can only piece together a little of how they were worshipped.

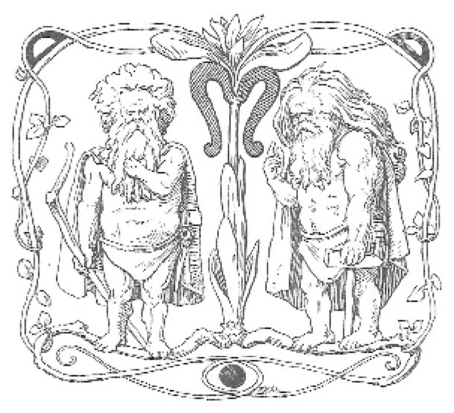
Paganism was a religion of ritual rather than faith. No one doubted the existence of gods and other powers; religion was there to get the gods on-side. Through sacrifice – generally animal although there are some intimations of occasional human sacrifice – the gods' blessing might be gained, thus ensuring the supplicant's hál, an Old English word meaning fortune or divine blessing from which derive the words 'hale' and 'healthy'.

Pagan sanctuaries were generally woodlands groves or glades – in one such, Penda displayed the severed head and arms of Oswald after the Battle of Maserfield. Such places were often named hearg, which becomes Harrow ('Harrow-on-the-Hill') in later English. Pagan priesthood appears to have been inherited, and the priests themselves were marked out from the rest of the elite by the taboo against them using weapons or riding stallions.


In Norse legend, Woden is called Odin. Many more stories of the gods survive in Norse than in Old English



Slaves and hunting dogs were Britain's main exports in the early Medieval period, so it was no surprise that Gregory should see Anglo-Saxons in Rome's market



Dwarves were chthonic creatures associated with the mysteries of the blacksmith's forge

Elves and dwarves

The Anglo-Saxons believed in elves who were nothing like Legolas

Apart from the gods, the Anglo-Saxons believed in many other classes of supernatural beings, including elves and dwarves. These beings were regarded with wary respect; they could occasionally be helpful to people, but they were more likely to do them harm. This was something particularly associated with elves ('ælf' in Old English). There were charms against 'elf shot', the invisible darts the elves could shoot into people that caused sudden illnesses, and propitiatory rituals that were practised near sites associated with elves.

While elves were clearly seen as dangerous, there must have been good fortune associated with them also, since so many parents gave their children names using the 'ælf' prefix – 'Ælfred' the Great not least among them – and it seems unlikely that parents would name their sons after implacably malevolent beings. Dweorgas (dwarves) were creatures of barrows and mountains, smiths who might help people if aid was sought from them. Less fickle than the elves, the service of a dwarf might be bought by offering the dwarf something he wanted in exchange for his skills as a smith. But woe to you if you tried to cheat a dwarf of his due: their memories of double dealing were long and they liked revenge served cold.

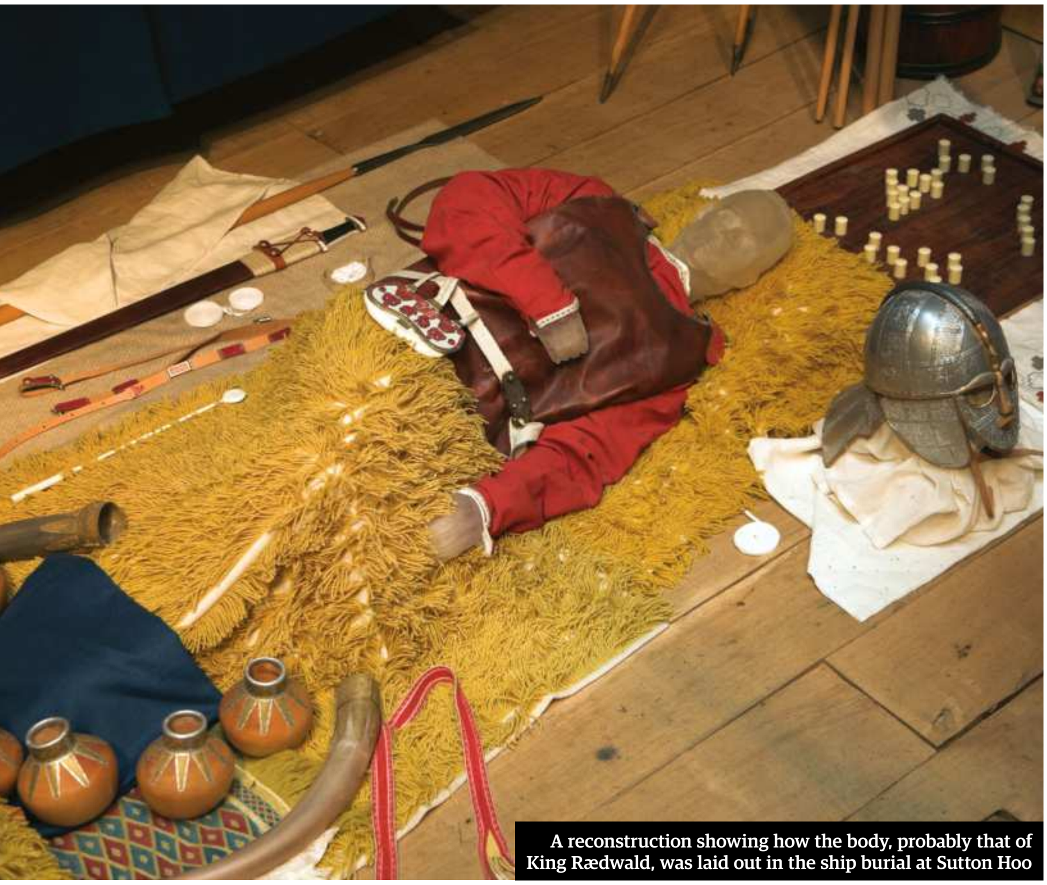
up his rule, while abjuring the religion of his father, presumably also to win the support of major families who had not become reconciled to the new religion. There was a similar reaction against the new religion among the East Saxons when their king died. It seemed that the whole mission was on the brink of failure.

However, in East Anglia, a fugitive prince named Edwin had taken refuge with Rædwald. He was being pursued by Æthelfrith, the king of Northumbria (who was married to Edwin's sister, Acha). Æthelfrith was the most feared warrior king in Britain and, learning of Edwin's whereabouts, Æthelfrith sent a series of increasingly peremptory demands to Rædwald that he deliver Edwin's person or his head to the king of Northumbria. Fearful of Æthelfrith's reputation, Rædwald was on the point of doing so when his wife shamed him into remembering the obligations due to him as Edwin's host and the man who had given him sanctuary. Rædwald decided to fight. With Edwin beside him, Rædwald rode out with his war band and, catching Æthelfrith by surprise on the banks of the River Idle, killed the man his enemies had nicknamed the 'Twister'. With Æthelberht but lately dead, this made Rædwald the most powerful king among the Anglo-Saxons, and his first move was to install Edwin as the new king of Northumbria.

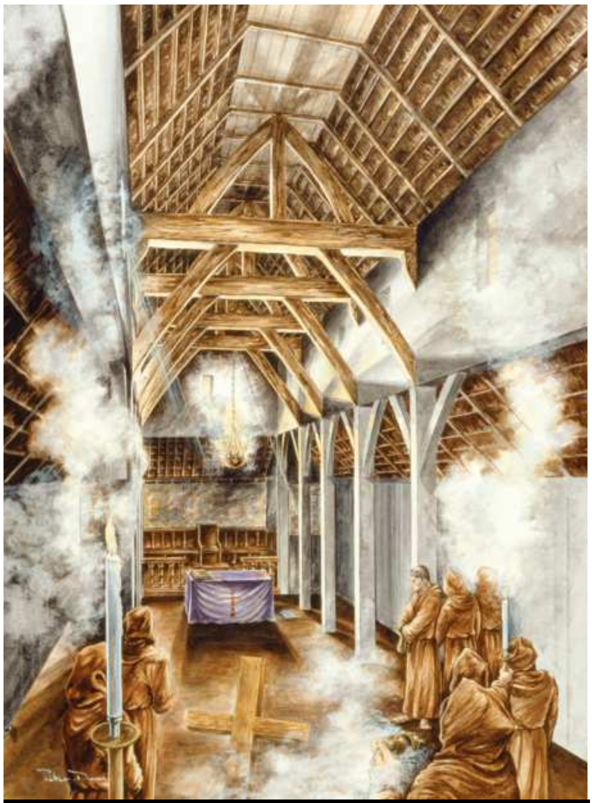
The unknown man buried in splendour at Sutton Hoo is most probably Rædwald, king of the East Angles. We don't know exactly when he died, but it was probably around 624, and with his passing Edwin, king of Northumbria, who had been steadily annexing minor kingdoms since his accession to the throne, was now indubitably the most powerful king in the land. But he was a king in search of a queen, his first wife having died.

Edwin found one in Kent, in Æthelburh, the Christian daughter of King Æthelberht. Eadbald, Æthelburh's brother, had renounced his pagan flirtation and returned to Christianity. Although not the dominant figure his father was, an alliance with Kent, the oldest of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, was a good match for Edwin. As part of the marriage negotiations, Edwin, still a pagan, agreed that Æthelburh, like her mother before her, could continue to practise her faith and permitted her to bring north, as a member of her household, the Italian Paulinus.

A cautious and careful man, Edwin knew well that this marriage carried the invitation to conversion to the new religion. With his wife and Paulinus as members of his itinerant court, he could consider such a momentous change carefully. In the end, despite signs and portents, the decision came down to whether he could carry his leading men with him. Edwin summoned the witan and the case for the new religion was placed before them. Then, according to Bede, one of the warriors present stood and, likening the present world to a well-lit hall sealed against the winds and cold of winter, spoke of a bird flying for a few minutes into the light and warmth, only to flight out again into the night. Such, he said, was the life of men: of that which comes before and after their life on earth they knew nothing. If the new religion offered greater



A reconstruction showing how the body, probably that of King Rædwald, was laid out in the ship burial at Sutton Hoo



Lindisfarne Priory became a centre of Anglo-Saxon Christianity, as well as home to Saint Cuthbert and the Lindisfarne Gospels, which are now heralded as masterpieces of early Medieval art

> "If the new religion offered greater knowledge of their origins and their fate, then they should adopt it"

knowledge of their origins and their fate, then they should adopt it. The witan had been won over.

Paulinus embarked on a mission of preaching and baptising. Edwin had adopted the new faith and, with God on his side, his reign would assure the adoption of the new faith among all the Anglo-Saxons, for the kings all wanted to be winners in this world as much as the next. But God, it turned out, did not necessarily back his own side. On 12 October 632, Edwin met in battle Cadwallon, the Britonnic king of Gwynedd, and Penda of Mercia, and lost. Badly. Terminally, in his case and that of one his sons, and proximately for another, for he was taken prisoner and later executed.

Edwin's kingdom fell apart. Queen Æthelburh fled with her young children (the two sons who took part in the battle were from Edwin's first marriage) and Paulinus went with her, taking ship from York with whatever effects they could carry and sailing back to Kent. Without Paulinus, the religion newly adopted by the Northumbrians collapsed. Penda was a pagan. Cadwallon was a Christian but his animosity towards the Northumbrians was deep and unaffected by their conversion, and the memory of his ravaging lingered long in the kingdom. In despair of the new god, the Northumbrians reverted to their old ones, only for Woden and Thunor and the rest to fail them: Cadwallon killed their new king too.

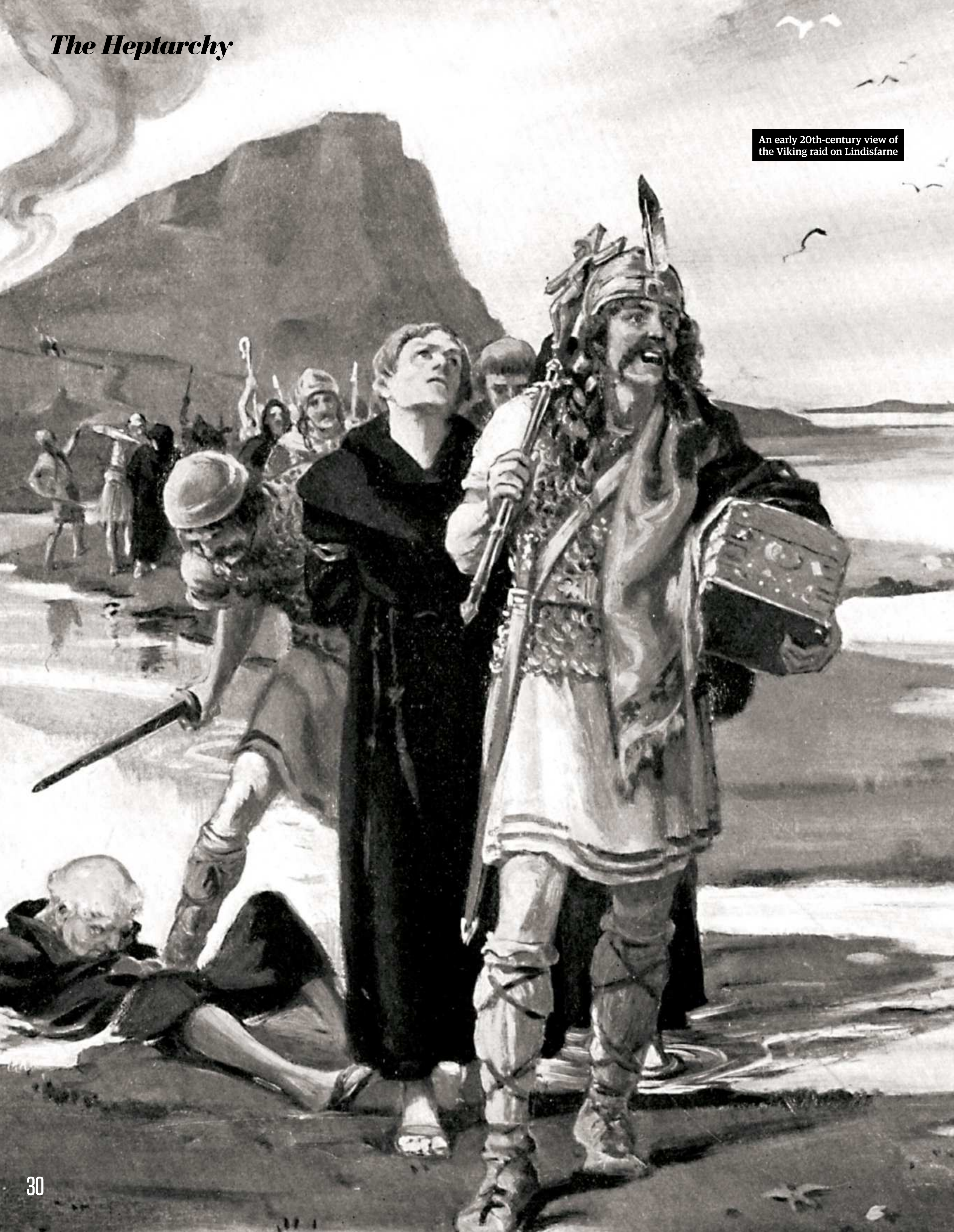
But away to the north, living in exile in the kingdom of Dál Riata was an ætheling, an eminently throne-worthy man, named Oswald. The son of Æthelfrith, Oswald had fled into exile with his mother and younger brother, Oswiu, when Edwin had killed his father. In exile, Oswald had embraced the new faith, learning its tenets and drinking its beauty from the monks of Iona.

In 634, Oswald, the king in exile, returned and, meeting Cadwallon in battle near Heavenfield, was victorious. Cadwallon was killed. Oswald, in the tumultuous manner of 7th-century kingship, had vaulted from exile to being the most powerful king in the land in the course of a single battle. And where Edwin's conversion to Christianity was clearly at least in part political, Oswald's was just as clearly heart-deep and personal: he ascribed his victory at Heavenfield to the intercession of Saint Columba, the founder of the monastery at Iona, and the king immediately sent to Iona for monks to come over to bring his people to the new faith.

The monk who came was named Aidan. Founding a monastery on the tidal island of Lindisfarne, within sight of the royal stronghold at Bamburgh, Aidan set about the conversion of the Northumbrians with the vocal support of the king - who undertook to translate for Aidan until he learned to speak English. Together, king and abbot created something that had not existed in Britain for centuries: a kingdom that could survive the death of its king. For Oswald died after a reign of eight years, falling in battle with Penda of Mercia, who had remained resolutely pagan when the other kings of the Anglo-Saxons had sought to ally themselves with Oswald by accepting baptism.

But even though Oswald had died, the kingdom held together, bound by the glue of the new religion that Aidan had inculcated in its people. Oswald's younger brother, Oswiu, took over as king in a somewhat shrunken Northumbria, playing for time against the overweening might of Penda, who seems to have rampaged across the country for the next 13 years, removing kings almost at will.

In 655, however, the pressure from Penda had become intolerable and Oswiu risked everything on one throw of the battle dice. Despite facing Penda's much larger army, Oswiu marched to battle. The two armies met at the River Winwæd, probably in the vicinity of Leeds, on 15 November 655 in driving rain. In the appalling conditions, Penda's army broke and fled, more dying in the waters of the flooded river than fell to the sword, and Penda himself was killed. The last great pagan king of the Anglo-Saxons was dead. The gods of battle had chosen the winner in the contest for the soul of the English, and he was the God whose name is peace.



An early 20th-century view of the Viking raid on Lindisfarne

EARLY VIKING RAIDS

From Lindisfarne to the Great Heathen Army

Written by **Wayne Bartlett**

The name of Beaduheard is not perhaps as well-remembered these days as it should be. Beaduheard was a king's reeve (or sheriff), based at Dorchester in Dorset. One day in the year 789, he received news that a group of strangers had landed on the coast at nearby Portland. Portland was probably a trading base of some local significance (certainly it would be the target for a number of Viking raids over the years) and the arrival of strangers there would need to be investigated, so Beaduheard set out to do so.

The details of what happened when he arrived are unclear. Maybe there was a misunderstanding between two groups who did not speak exactly the same language, or perhaps what occurred was quite deliberate. The end result, however, was clear enough; Beaduheard lay dead, the first known victim of the Vikings in England. His killers were men from Scandinavia, probably from Hordaland in southwest Norway.

This is the first surviving reference to a Viking attack in England. That, however, does not mean that there were not any before this; it could be that other earlier attacks were unrecorded or that records were subsequently lost. There are hints though that this was not an isolated incident; charters from the reign of the great Mercian king Offa (who died in 796), mention the building of coastal fortifications against "marauding heathens", which probably means Vikings, so clearly the threat from the northern raiders was already starting to ring a few alarm-bells.

While the incident at Portland may have been disturbing, it was not perhaps that unusual in what were frequently violent times. The next known raid was at the opposite end of the spectrum. It was at the other end of the country too; rather than the kingdom of Wessex suffering another attack, this time it was Northumbria in the northeast that fell victim to the Viking hordes.

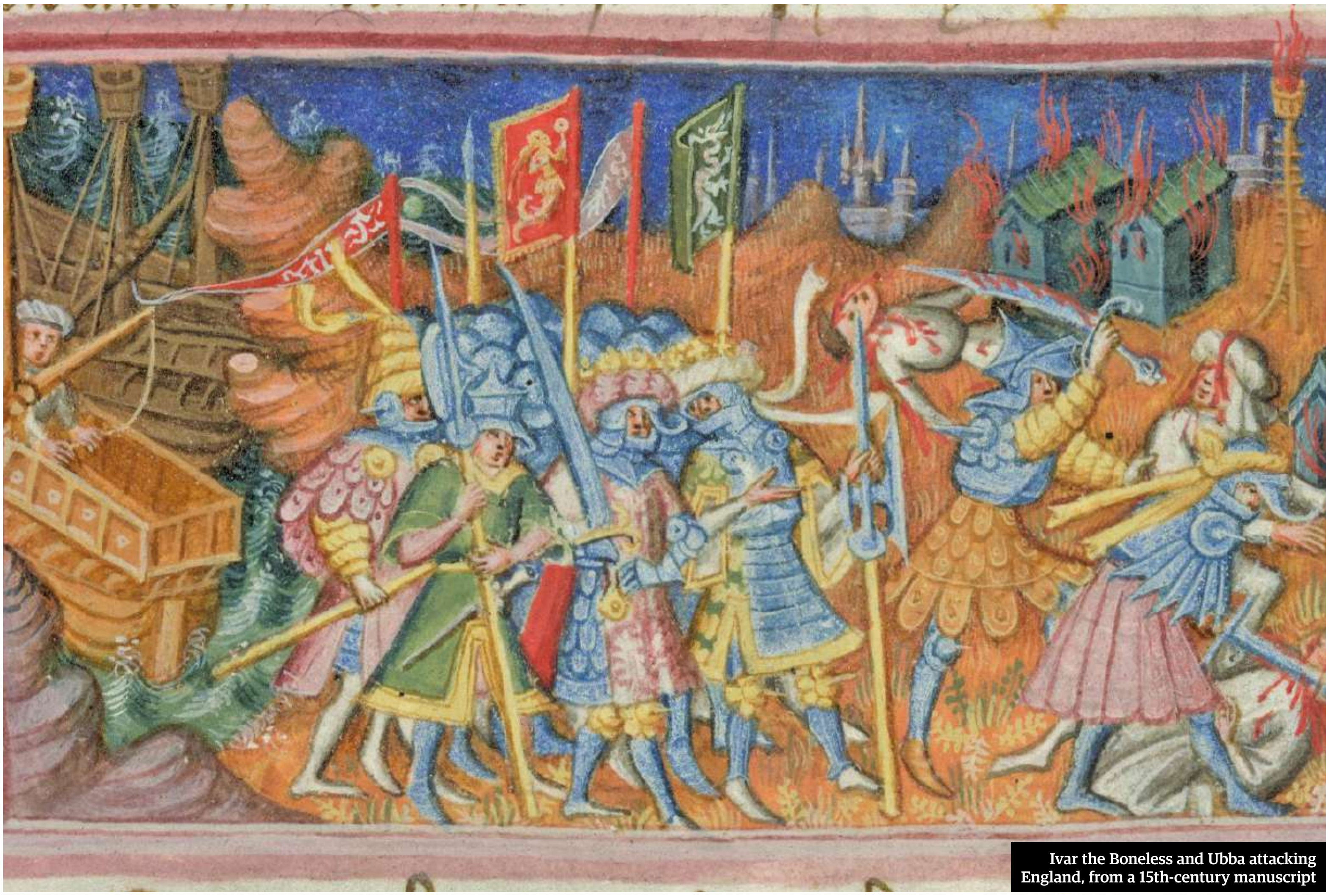
Lindisfarne was a very sacred site. The monastery there housed the relics of Saint Cuthbert, the pre-eminent Anglo-Saxon saint. Nowadays it seems a remote and distant place, but at the end of the 8th century it was a hub of spiritual and physical activity. A few miles off, well within view on most days, was the ancient Northumbrian fortress of Bamburgh, one of the oldest occupied sites of Anglo-Saxon England, keeping a distant but in this case useless watch on the monastery.

On a June day in 793, a hammer-blow fell on the monastery in the shape of a catastrophic Viking raid. The monks were caught completely unaware when the raiders came in from the sea, though it is quite probable that the raiders knew exactly where they were headed. Lindisfarne was famous and, by the standards of the day, wealthy. It is quite possible that the raiders had traded with the place before and noticed its flimsy protection. It was very common for a Viking to be a trader one day and a raider the next; whatever seemed to offer the best chance of profit in any given circumstance would dictate which one it would be.

Lindisfarne went up in flames. Its treasures were looted (to the Vikings that would mean taking gold and silver rather than the wonderful manuscripts made there - unless these happened to be in richly decorated book bindings, these were of little interest). Monks were drowned or brutally murdered where they stood. But there was another prize on offer too, one that was altogether more sinister and possibly more attractive to the raiders: slaves. The Vikings would make a very lucrative living from the buoyant slave trade and healthy young men, attractive women and children with the potential to be either were very valuable commodities. Certainly the raiders took slaves away with them from Lindisfarne, as they would on many other occasions in the future.

In Francia, the Northumbrian scholar Alcuin, who was based at the court of the great Holy Roman emperor Charlemagne, wrote back home in shock at the turn of events in Northumbria. To him, as to many subsequent commentators, the Vikings were God's avengers, a terrifying punishment for the sinful way of life lived by many Northumbrians, both secular and clerical. Loose-living, and even dressing like pagans, were quoted as some of the specific sins that had outraged God. The Northumbrians would need to mend their ways or more raids would follow.

And follow they did, for a time; other great monasteries were raided such as those at Jarrow-Monkwearmouth and Hartness (later Hartlepool). But in the first few decades of the 9th century,



Ivar the Boneless and Ubba attacking England, from a 15th-century manuscript

specific mentions of Viking raids in England dry up. This again does not necessarily mean that none took place; certainly the Vikings were known to be very active in Ireland and Scotland during this period. However, our main source for the period, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, was not written up until towards the end of the 9th century, so in the interim records may have been lost.

Vikings were certainly active in Wessex once more in 836, when they attacked Carhampton in Somerset, an important royal estate. The West Saxon king Ecgbert was defeated when he faced them in battle. He had his revenge though, when shortly afterwards he bested a combined Viking-Cornish army at Hingston Down near the River Tamar. Cornwall had recently been subjugated by the West Saxons and clearly some of the Cornish thought that an alliance with a Viking force was preferable to being under the control of Wessex. The Vikings were very capable of forging alliances when it suited their purpose.

The intensity of the Viking attacks ratcheted up in the 850s and 860s. In 851 a Viking force over-wintered at Thanet in Kent rather than go home for the season. This suggested that Viking attacks were becoming more ambitious in their scope and coincided with an upsurge in activity in Ireland, too. While there was no direct political relationship between the kingdoms of England and those of Ireland, their proximity meant that Vikings were able to move and raid between the two main islands with relative impunity.

> “They slaughtered the incumbent king, Ælle. In one lurid account, he was subjected to a brutal ritual execution”

The climax of this upsurge in activity saw the arrival of what was ominously known as the Great Heathen Army (mycel hæþen here) in 865. This was allegedly led by three sons of a legendary figure, Ragnar Loðbrok, who were named Halfdan, Ubba and Ivar (possibly another equally legendary figure known as Ivar the Boneless). They first of all made their way to East Anglia where they forced the king, Edmund, to provide them with horses and provisions (the Vikings were outstanding horsemen as well as seafarers). This substantial force then took York (Anglo-Saxon Eoforwic) which would eventually become the foremost Viking settlement in England, Jorvik. In the process they slaughtered the incumbent king whose name was Ælle. In one lurid account, he was subjected to the brutal ritual execution known as the ‘blood eagle’, in which the victim’s torso was cut open, his ribs hacked apart and his lungs splayed across his back like wings in a macabre imitation of an eagle. Not all historians believed that this actually happened – much of the Viking story is told by later saga-writers who clearly had an interest in embellishing their plotlines – but there are other accounts of this ritual execution being used, so we cannot be sure that the story is a complete fabrication.

The Vikings then moved on Mercia, forcing the kingdom into submission, before returning to East Anglia. This time they took the kingdom here too, in the process killing King Edmund. In some accounts (written slightly after the event) Edmund was also ritually executed, this time by being tied up and shot to death with arrows in imitation of Saint Sebastian. Certainly Edmund would become England’s foremost martyr-king and he

Lindisfarne, where the Viking attack in 793 caused widespread shock in Europe

would become a prominent saint, which is ironic considering that many Christianised Vikings later set up their home in the country.

Wessex now stood alone, and the Great Heathen Army fell on it in 870. Ivar was now absent from the army - he is known to have been active in Scotland and Ireland at about this time - and the force was now led by Halfdan and a new leader by the name of Guthrum. In the succeeding year, the Great Heathen Army moved deeper into Wessex in a campaign that included nine battles and undoubtedly many other skirmishes. There was supposedly a great Anglo-Saxon victory at Ashdown, but in fact this made little difference to the course of events.

The Viking war machine moved inexorably on, winning victories at Basing, Meretun and Wilton. Sometime during the campaign the king of Wessex, Æthelred I, died - possibly of wounds suffered in one of the battles - and his place was taken by his young, then-inexperienced brother Alfred. Alfred had grown up quickly during the campaign and negotiated a truce with the Viking force - undoubtedly an arrangement that cost him a lot of money. The Vikings, satisfied with the takings from their extended foray but possibly also needing to regroup and reinforce, moved out of Wessex for the time being; but they would not be away for long. Their absence gave the soon-to-be great Alfred a chance to rally, and plan his revenge.

What's in a name?

It's time to uncover why we call them 'Vikings'

There are several theories as to how the Vikings got their name. One is that the word 'Viking' derives from the old Norse 'vik', which means creek or bay, referring to the harbours where they moored their ships. Another theory is that the name comes from the region known as the Viken, around the Oslofjord in Norway, though this would be somewhat misleading as many Vikings came from other parts of Norway, as well as Sweden and Denmark and even further afield. In Old Norse, to go a-viking (fara i viking) was to set out on a raid, so perhaps the most likely origin of the word means some kind of raider.

They were rarely called Vikings by their victims. In the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* they were often referred to as Danes, while elsewhere, such as in Francia (which covered modern France, the Low Countries and much of Germany) they were called Northmen, from which the word 'Norman' derives. The suggestion of a specific national origin for the raiders is misleading: so-called Danish armies that invaded England, for example, often had warriors from Sweden and Norway among their number. There is even archaeological evidence that men might have come from as far away as Finland, Poland and Belarus on occasion.

Vikings are often depicted as raiding warriors

ALFRED Vs THE VIKINGS

How a defeated and abandoned king rose from the ultimate underdog to become one of the most celebrated monarchs in English history

Written by **Frances White**

The rain thundered down on the wet, swampy moors of Wessex. A crack of lightning set the sky alight before the wasteland was plunged into darkness once more. Alfred staggered as he ran breathlessly through the plains, accompanied by a handful of men. They were all pale, shivering and soaked to the bone.

"We must find shelter." The words had barely left Alfred's mouth before his foot caught on a root and he crashed into the mud. "My lord," his companion offered his hand, but Alfred shook his head and pushed himself to his feet. Standing breathlessly in the wide, open plain, he glanced back to the land that was once his. The cities of Wessex were a mere glimmer in the distance, little lights where he had grown into a man, shot his first boar and fathered his children. Now they belonged to his enemies and he was an exile, betrayed by those he thought loyal, no longer a king and anything but great.

Alfred was not born to be king. He wasn't strong, he suffered with illness throughout his life and most of all, he was the fifth-born son. He seemed destined to a life of study in the priesthood, something he was perfectly happy about. Although far from a coward, he was milder and more thoughtful than his rowdy brothers. However, he had been born in a time of unrest and war.

Since the attack on Lindisfarne monastery in 793, Viking raids all around Britain had increased in number and ferocity. In 865, a huge army dismounted from a fleet of ships, and while the previous attacks had been men eager for quick plunder, this was an army that didn't intend to return home. It wanted one thing - conquest.

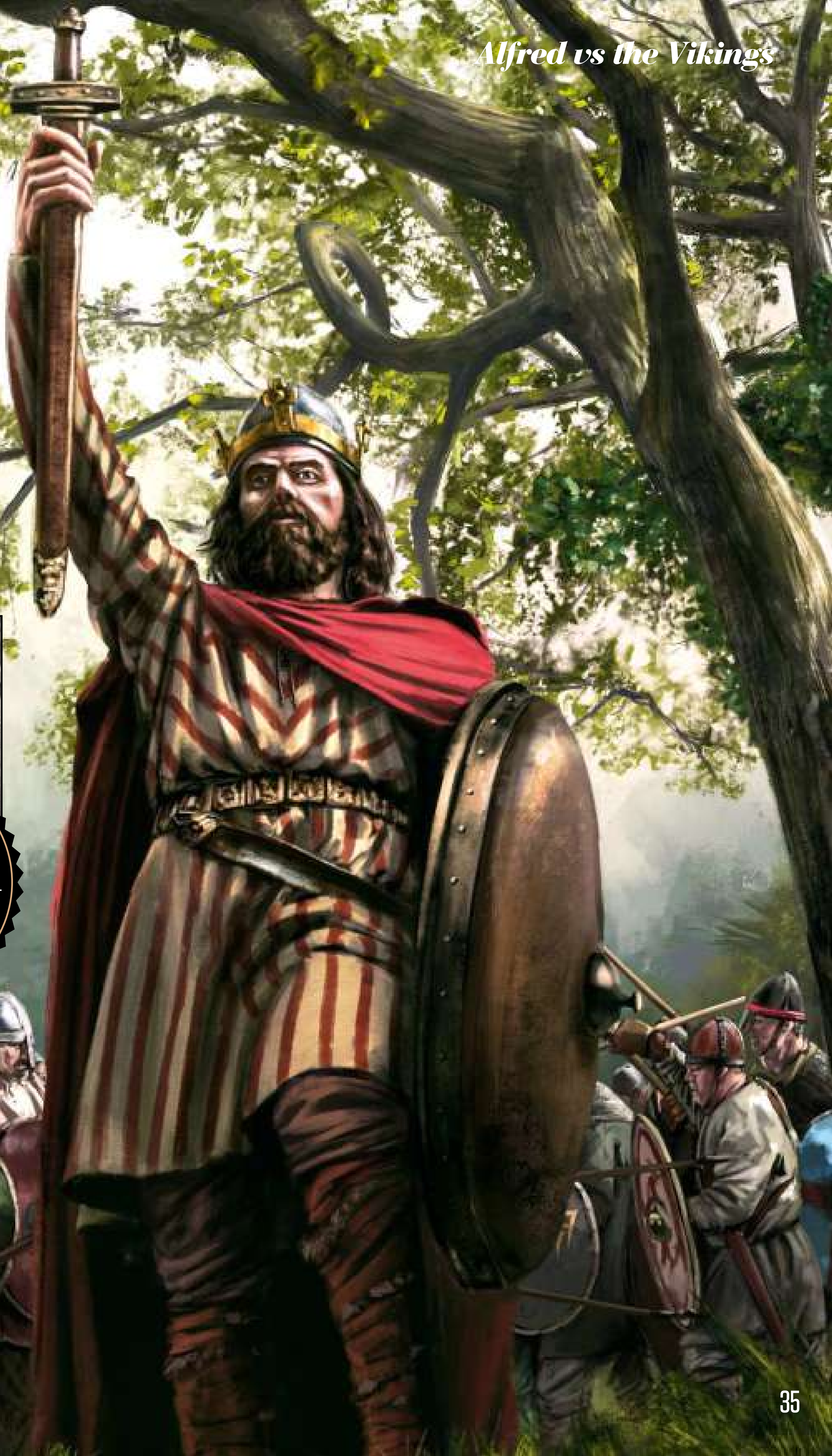
This attack was very bad timing for the kingdom of Wessex. Alfred's father, king of Wessex for nearly 20 years, was dead. The throne passed between his two eldest sons, but death followed them both quickly, and in 865, the leadership fell to Alfred's older brother Æthelred.

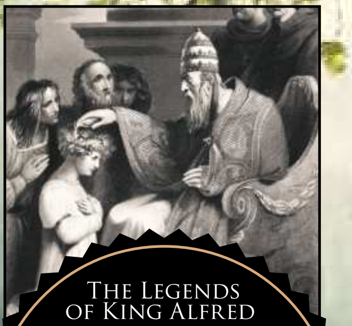
In 866, the Viking army was on the move. At least 1,000 strong, it slaughtered its way across the country, felling any nation that stood in its way. East Anglia, Northumbria and even Mercia, Wessex's northern neighbour, became Viking property. Those kings who tried to pay the invaders off, such as the East Anglian monarch, Edmund, found themselves later repaid by swift and brutal conquest. Soon, the only Anglo-Saxon nation that remained unclaimed by the pagan raiders was the exposed kingdom of Wessex.

The Vikings were not hesitant about making their move; they captured Reading in the winter of 870 but suffered a surprising defeat at Englefield by a small Anglo-Saxon force. Spurred by news of this triumph, the young king and his brother were determined to stop the raiders in their tracks. Fuelled by the taste of victory, Alfred and Æthelred gathered their forces for a raid on the Viking stronghold in Reading.

Although they were filled with dogged determination, this was the first time both of the brothers had faced a real battle situation, and it didn't end well. Although they achieved initial success, when the gates of the fortress opened a wave of bloodthirsty Vikings poured out and laid waste to the Wessex forces. The English turned and fled for their lives, pursued for miles. It was a humiliating defeat for the man who would one day be known as 'great'.

For the Vikings, the victory was all the encouragement they needed. With Wessex exposed and the rest of England in submission, they stormed towards the centre of the region.

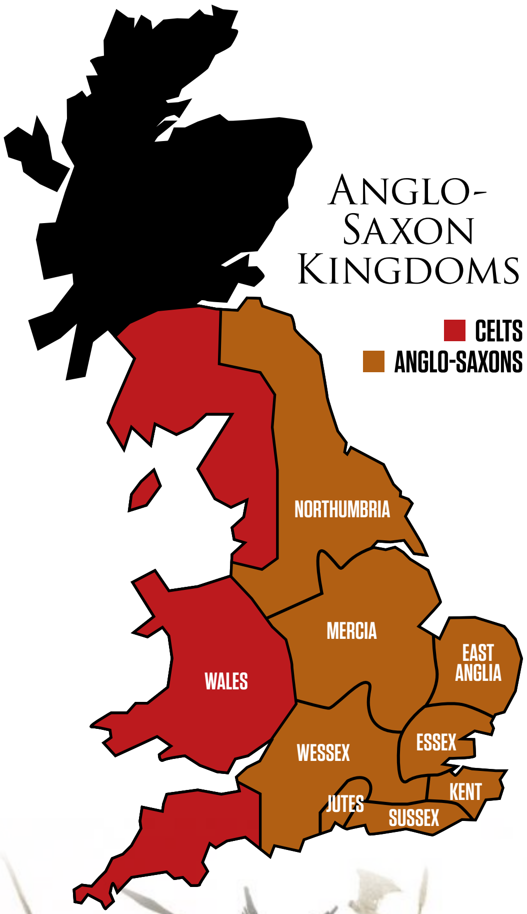


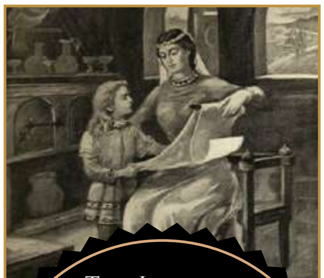


THE LEGENDS
OF KING ALFRED

A powerful friend

Aged just four, Alfred is said to have travelled to Rome to meet the pope, who apparently "anointed him as king". This is surprising as Alfred was the fifth son, and could mean the young prince was confirmed or made a consul, as it was believed he would go into the Church.





THE LEGENDS OF KING ALFRED

Quick learner

Alfred's mother, showing her children a beautiful book of Saxon poetry, told them that whoever was first able to memorise it would get to keep it. Alfred was fascinated, but unable to read. So he took it to tutors and managed to learn it, receiving the book in reward.

The raiders outnumbered the fractured and broken Wessex forces considerably and this skeleton army could only watch as the Vikings moved closer to their capital. Although the Saxons put up a brave resistance, the battlegrounds transformed into scenes of slaughter, and as the brothers faced the Vikings for the ninth exhausting time, the Wessex army fled in panic.

The bodies of Anglo-Saxon dead were strewn about the field, and the king received a mortal wound. Within a month he was dead, and his passing was followed by the arrival of a fresh fleet of Viking ships.

Æthelred had sons, but they were young, and with the fate of Wessex dangling on a knife edge, it was agreed that Alfred would rule, in the hope that a strong ruler could unite the forces and claim victory from the jaws of defeat.

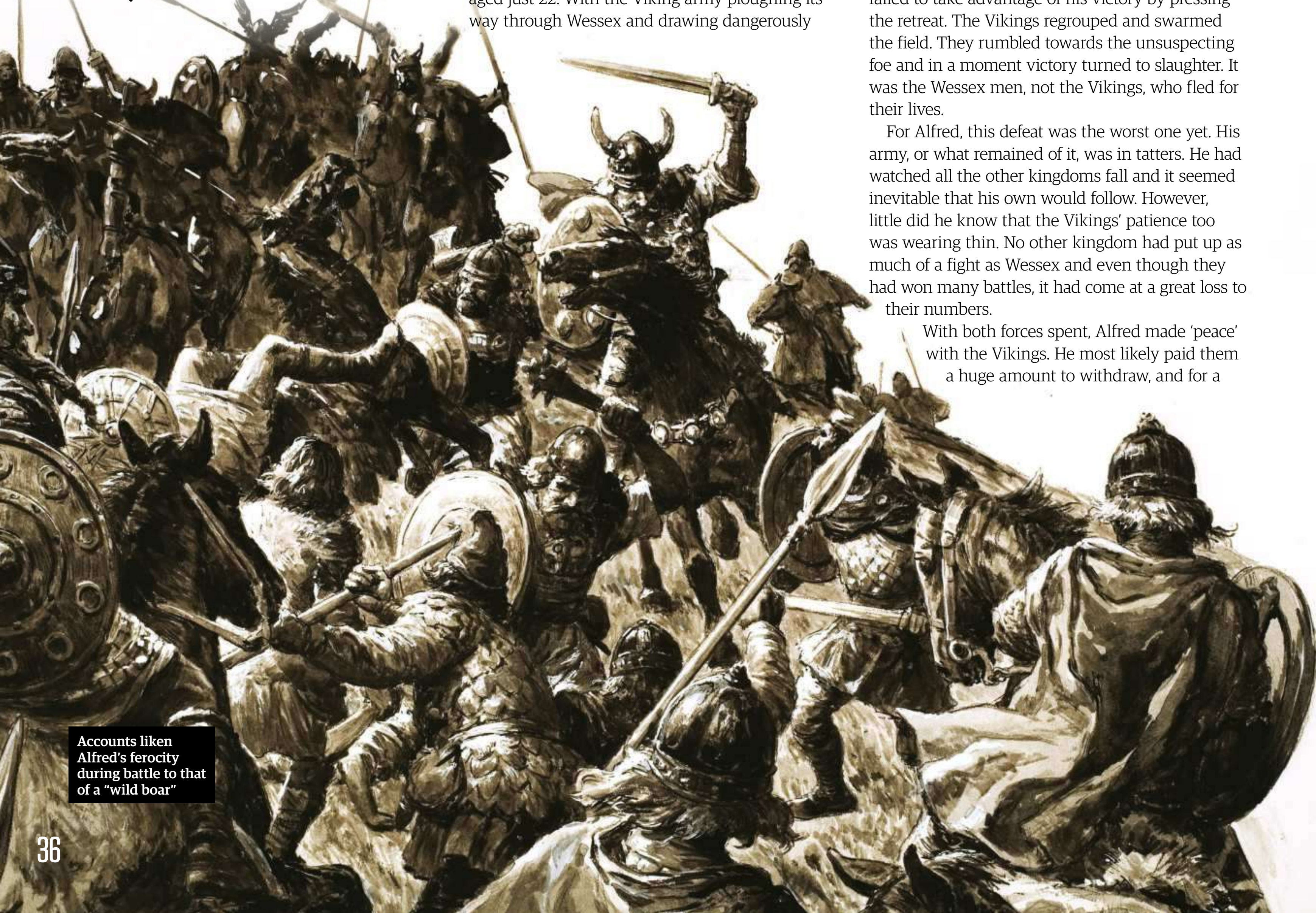
It is difficult to think of an English crown more burdensome than the one Alfred inherited in 871, aged just 22. With the Viking army ploughing its way through Wessex and drawing dangerously close to the capital, Alfred decided that he would try to settle things on his terms. He set out to halt the army's advance at Wilton, less than 30 miles from his capital city of Winchester.

One thing was immediately obvious - Alfred was vastly outnumbered. He had struggled to quickly assemble a force and the Viking ranks were swelling with eager new conquerors and gold seekers. Aware that this was his first battle as king, Alfred knew he had no option but to lead from the front. He ordered his men to form the shield-wall and faced his mighty enemies. Perhaps benefiting from the strength that only men defending their homeland are gifted, the Wessex forces somehow managed to hold their ground. What they lacked in numbers they made up for in will and they destroyed the enemy shield-wall. In mild disbelief, Alfred watched as the Vikings fled and his men celebrated around him.

But young Alfred made a crucial mistake. He had failed to take advantage of his victory by pressing the retreat. The Vikings regrouped and swarmed the field. They rumbled towards the unsuspecting foe and in a moment victory turned to slaughter. It was the Wessex men, not the Vikings, who fled for their lives.

For Alfred, this defeat was the worst one yet. His army, or what remained of it, was in tatters. He had watched all the other kingdoms fall and it seemed inevitable that his own would follow. However, little did he know that the Vikings' patience too was wearing thin. No other kingdom had put up as much of a fight as Wessex and even though they had won many battles, it had come at a great loss to their numbers.

With both forces spent, Alfred made 'peace' with the Vikings. He most likely paid them a huge amount to withdraw, and for a



Accounts liken Alfred's ferocity during battle to that of a "wild boar" good few years it worked. However, in 876, Alfred faced a new foe, the Viking king Guthrum.

Guthrum had already managed, through great cunning, to travel through the heart of Wessex and seize the town of Wareham from under Alfred's nose. Although they made a treaty of peace, the arrival of hundreds more Viking ships indicated relations were anything but friendly. With his army reinforced, Guthrum headed straight towards Alfred's stronghold in Chippenham with one aim in sight. He didn't want a quick raid or a battle; he wanted Wessex, and to get it he would destroy the one thing holding it together – Alfred.

Guthrum planned his attack perfectly. The Twelfth Night was a festival that took over the entire city, a season of revelry with eating, drinking and merriment. Every person from king to peasant was part of the celebration and the defences of Chippenham were exposed and unguarded. Guthrum took advantage of this lapse and the city was overrun by Vikings within moments. Alfred had no time to summon an army and was forced to flee with his family to Wiltshire. However, it turned out that the powerful Viking king with his huge force presented a very convincing argument, and one by one the nobles of Wessex bowed to their new ruler. The leadership of Wessex was destroyed and Alfred, with nobody to call on, fled into the darkness of the moors.

This was more than humiliation for the king – it was the lowest point in his life. The loss of riches meant little, as Anglo-Saxon kings did not sit on golden thrones, but side by side on the mead bench with their faithful companions. And that was just it – he had no companions, he was alone. In a world where loyalty and faithfulness were prized above all, he had been cast out, a virtual exile because of a chain of swift and brutal betrayals.

Alfred could have easily succumbed to the hopelessness of his situation, but instead he decided to fight. He and a small band of followers built a hidden camp in a swamp in Athelney, Somerset, and used it as a base to unleash hell upon the invaders. For months Alfred and his men fought a guerilla war against the Danes, sneaking out of Somerset, killing small parties of Vikings they passed, looting camps and seeking out the enemies' vulnerabilities. Their number one target was the English who had betrayed Alfred, hoping their deaths would send a clear message to his people that the king had not abandoned them.

Tales of Alfred's deeds soon spread throughout the population, comforting those loyal that the king would return and free them from their Danish suppressors. Slowly but surely a secret network of communication between the exiled king and his loyal earls formed. For Guthrum, the attacks by Alfred and his

ANATOMY OF AN ANGLO-SAXON WARRIOR

Shield

The crucial piece of equipment for any Anglo-Saxon warrior, one of the primary battle tactics was the shield-wall. Not only did this protect against the enemies' missiles, but it could also be used to push forward and break the enemy line. The first shield line to break would be the losers, so hardy, strong shields were essential.

Spear

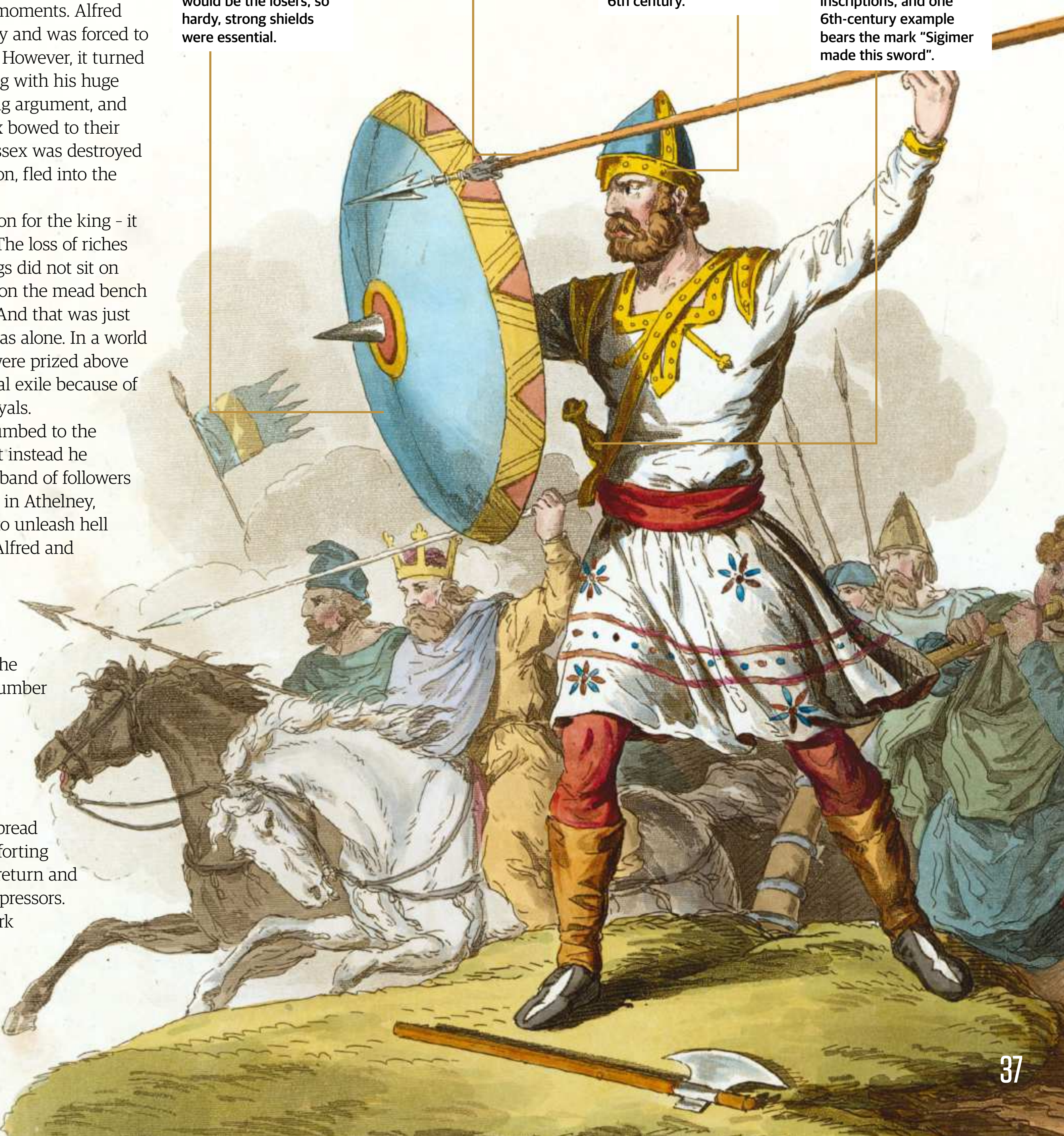
Possibly the most common Anglo-Saxon weapon, spears went hand in hand with the shield-wall tactic, being thrown as javelins and thrusting weapons. The size and material of spearheads differed hugely, as did the length – ranging from about five foot to over nine foot.

Helmet

Known as 'helms', the lack of evidence of Anglo-Saxon helmets have led many to believe that they were not commonly used, or were made from perishable materials like leather. The earliest Anglo-Saxon helmet discovered was found at Sutton Hoo and dates as far back as the 6th century.

Sword

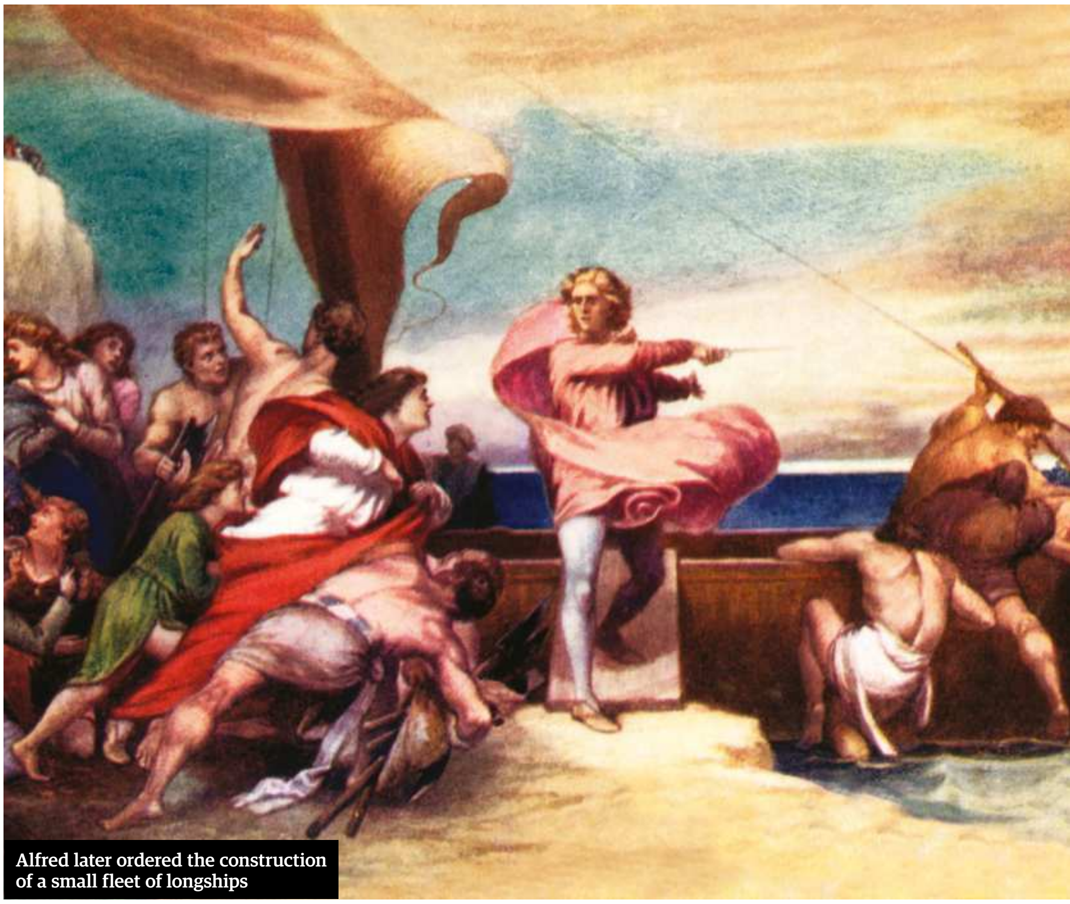
Swords were very treasured items, with connotations of status, and not just any soldier could wield one. Rather than melting iron ore, the blades of swords were constructed from several small pieces of iron or welded together. Swords would also often be decorated with inscriptions, and one 6th-century example bears the mark "Sigimer made this sword".



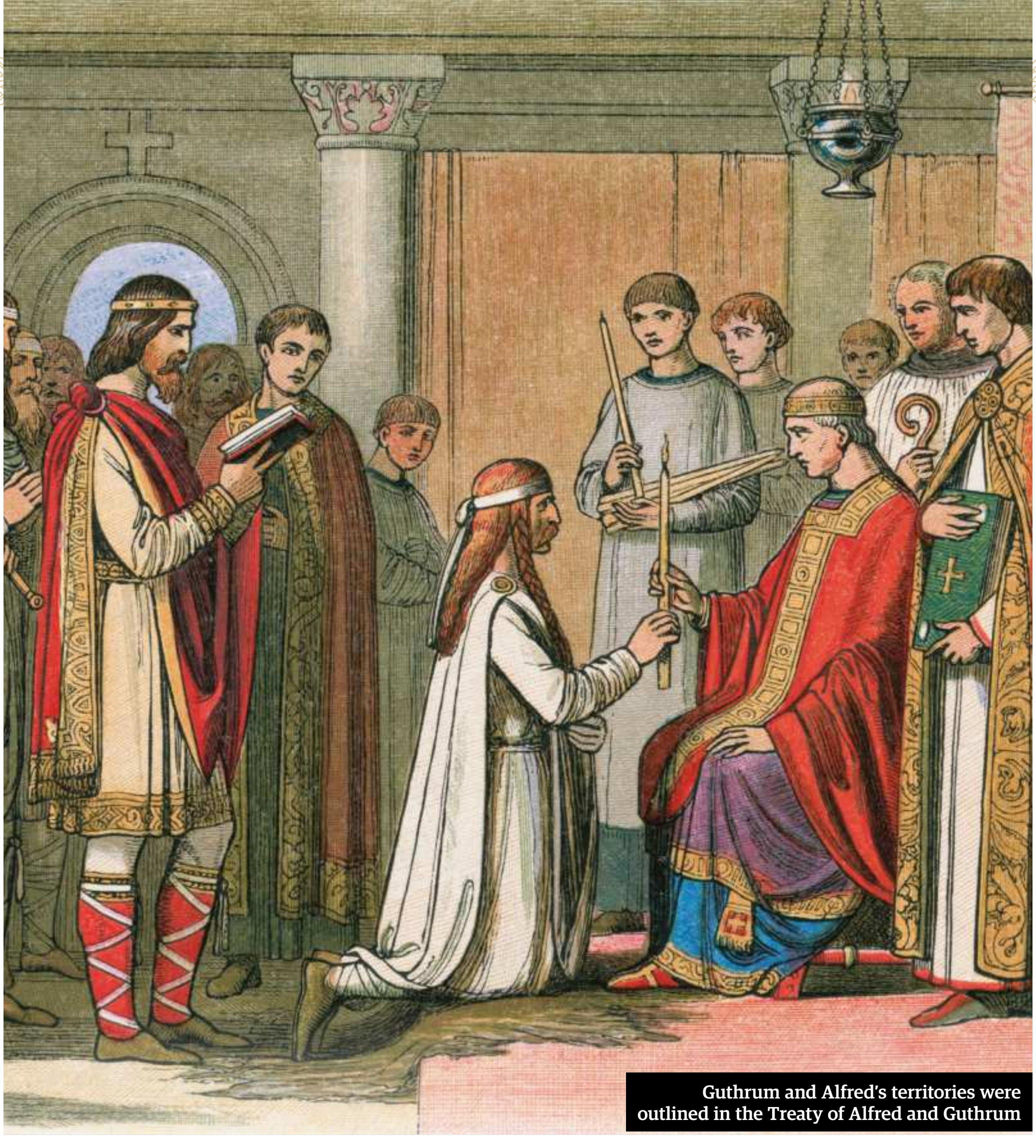
The search for a king's remains

Although we do not know the exact circumstances of Alfred's death, it is known that he suffered from a lifelong condition that may have been Crohn's disease. After his death, Alfred was first buried in the Old Minster in Winchester in 899, but four years later his body was moved to the New Minster. According to legend, this was because his body wandered around the church, but it is more likely that New Minster was the original intended resting place. He didn't get to rest for long though, as in 1110 Alfred's body, along with the monks, was transferred to Hyde Abbey. In 1539, during the reign of Henry VIII, the church was demolished, but the graves remained intact.

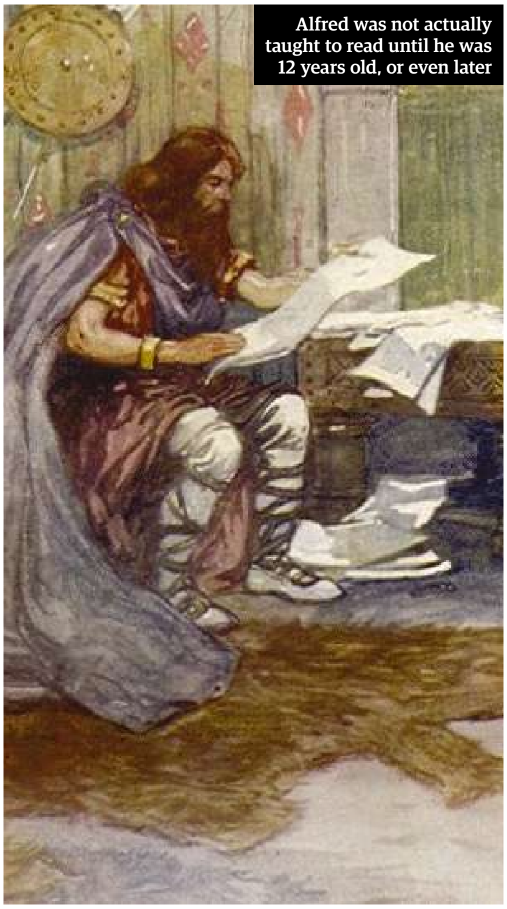
The site lay pretty much untouched until it was purchased to construct a prison in 1788. Convicts likely discovered the coffins while ridding the site of rubble, and promptly pocketed anything of value. Any bones found were simply tossed around the area. The prison was torn down between 1846 and 1850, and in 1999 an excavation discovered not only the foundations of the abbey, but also some bones. However, to much disappointment, these bones were found to belong to an elderly woman, and the rest of the excavation objects were placed in a store room in a Winchester museum. However, in 2014, it was announced that a fragment of pelvic bone from this find had belonged to a man aged between 26 and 45, who died between 895 and 1017. Although it has not yet been proven, this age and date range makes it very likely that the bone belongs either to Alfred or his son, Edward.



Alfred later ordered the construction of a small fleet of longships



Guthrum and Alfred's territories were outlined in the Treaty of Alfred and Guthrum

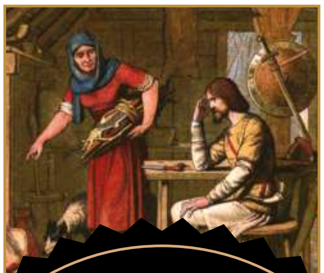


Alfred was not actually taught to read until he was 12 years old, or even later

band of warriors were the last stumbling block to full control of Wessex, and he wanted rid of the persistent pest once and for all.

By the middle of April, Alfred was ready for war; he sent out a secret summons and assembled those faithful to him - an army of several thousand men - and headed for Guthrum's stronghold in Chippenham. Guthrum soon learned of this large gathering, assembled his own army, and headed to intercept Alfred. The time for pay-offs and promises was over. Guthrum didn't care how many riches Alfred could offer - he wanted to rule unrivalled, which is exactly what Alfred wanted too.

Before he was able to reach Chippenham, Alfred caught sight of his enemy; a menacing shield-wall of towering Vikings jeered the exiled king. Alfred hastily formed his own shield-wall, and fortified it not only with physical strength but with a rousing speech. He implored his men to summon their courage, damned those who would dare to run, and promised glory to those who remained. Then he joined the wall and advanced.



THE LEGENDS OF KING ALFRED

Burning of the cakes

This legend is one of the most well known. While Alfred was on the run from the Vikings after the attack at Chippenham, he apparently sought refuge in the home of an old peasant woman. Seeing how run down, tired and hungry he was, she took pity on Alfred, unaware he was the king, and promised him food and shelter if he watched her cakes (small loaves of bread) while she went out. The king, consumed by his own problems concerning how he was going to beat the invaders, was distracted and let the cakes burn. When the woman returned, she scolded, and in some accounts even struck the king for his absentmindedness.

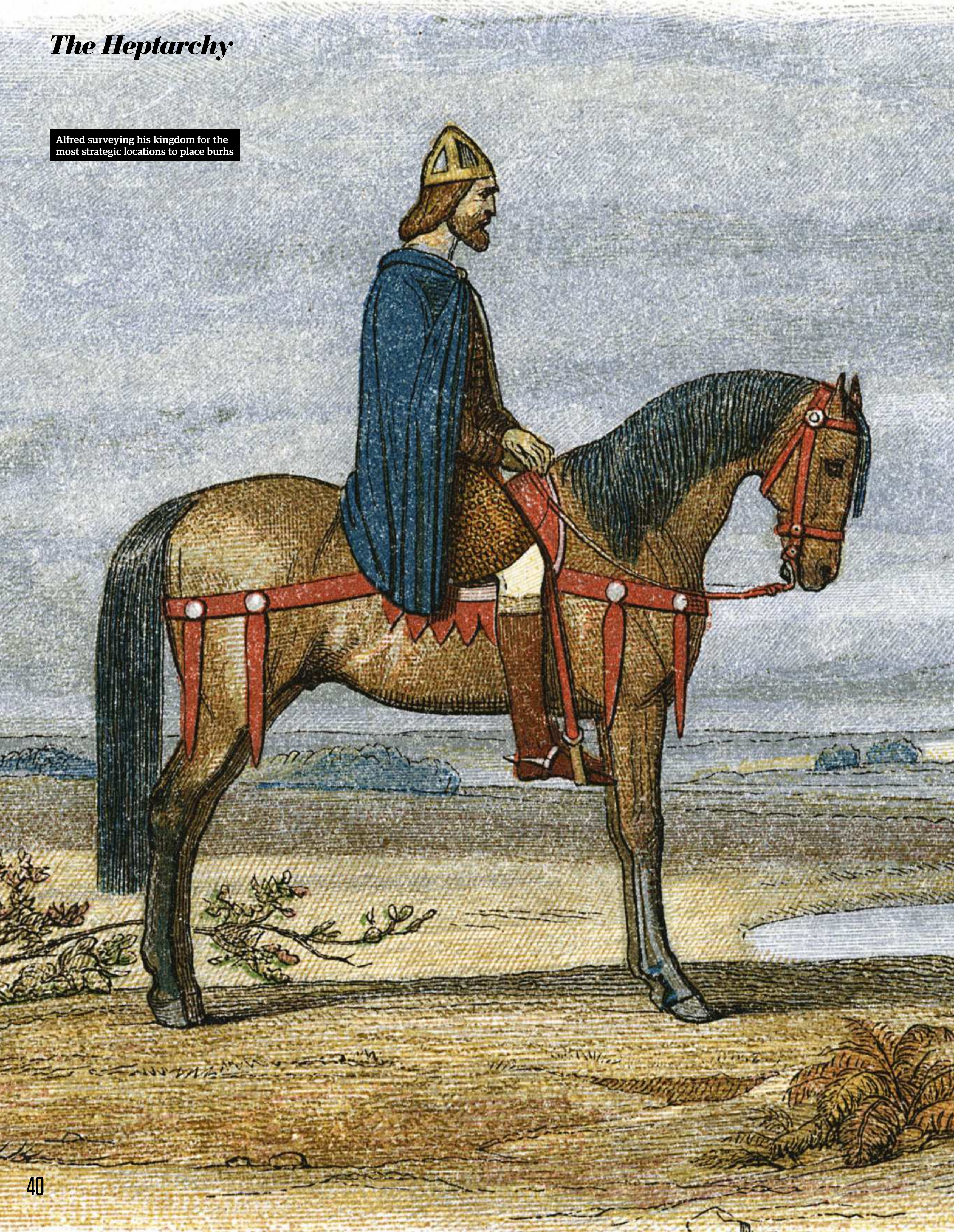
As the two walls drew close, the sky blackened with spears. Men were struck and fell, but both lines steadily advanced. As the Vikings mocked their opponents, Alfred made his cries of encouragement heard over the taunts. By now the walls were mere feet from each other, but the Vikings had one last trick. They unleashed their berserkers, savage warriors who used hallucinogens to drive them into a bloodthirsty rage. The naked men crashed into the Wessex shield-wall, but the effect was not as Guthrum had hoped. The Anglo-Saxons stood strong and unfazed, slaughtering the berserkers within moments. When the two shield-walls crashed into each other, the Saxons were stronger than ever. Spears jabbed, desperate to find a weak point to expose and force the shield-wall open.

The battle waged on into the afternoon, the ground was littered with corpses and those who remained were crippled with exhaustion. It transformed from a battle of might to one of endurance. With their forces equally matched, only the men with more resolve would emerge as the victors, and the Vikings were flagging. The fact was simple - the men of Wessex cared more for their home than the invaders ever could.

Finally, the Viking shield-wall was broken. The Saxons unleashed hell upon their invaders. Chaos reigned in the Norse ranks and the desperate men turned and fled. Alfred was not going to make the same mistake that had cost him so dearly again and he led the charge after the retreating men, staining the plains red with Viking blood. Guthrum managed to make it to Chippenham and attempted to begin a siege, but Alfred's resolve could not be broken. He set up his forces outside, waiting for the inevitable surrender.

After 14 days, Guthrum's will was spent. He begged Alfred for a chance to escape with his life, he would give the king anything - as many hostages as he wanted - he just wanted to leave. No Viking leader in history had offered such one-sided terms to an Anglo-Saxon king. Some would have taken advantage of this sign of desperation, but Alfred, although a warrior, was not a brute. He granted Guthrum mercy with one condition - Guthrum would be baptised a Christian, and Alfred would serve as godfather. Guthrum agreed - he would do anything to escape the kingdom of Wessex and its accursed king. The deed was done and the Viking king, for once, held up his side of the bargain. The two parted ways and Alfred returned to his capital in Winchester, finally free to begin rebuilding his nation.

© Alamy, Corbis, Look & Learn, Ian Hinley, Mary Evans



Alfred surveying his kingdom for the most strategic locations to place burhs

MAKING WESSEX VIKING-PROOF

Alfred had beaten the Viking invasion, but now he knew he had to prepare the kingdom in case they came back

Written by **Edoardo Albert**

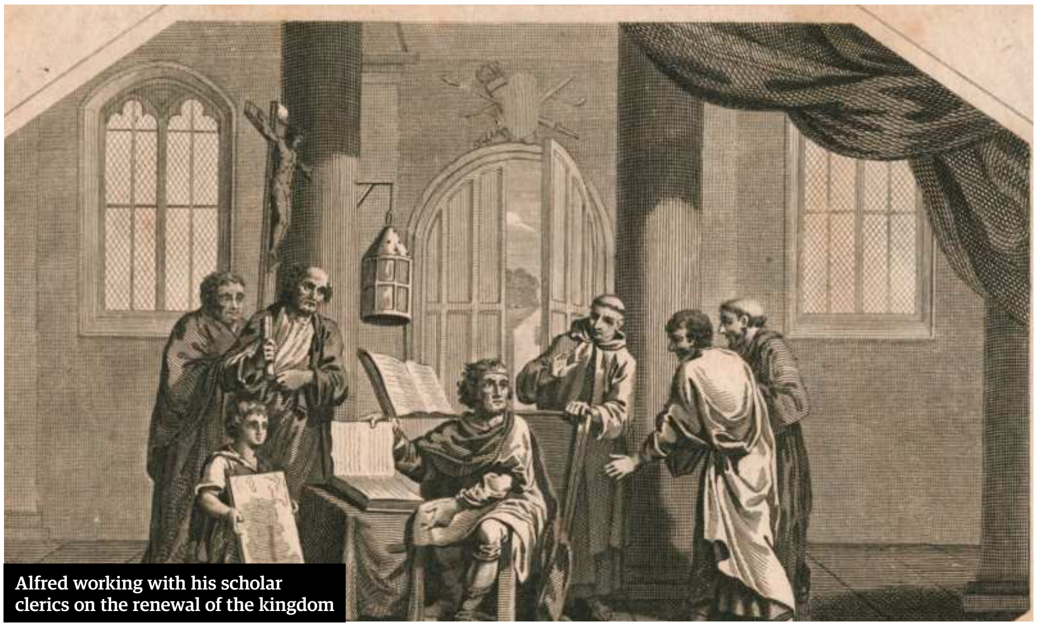
They would be back. While Alfred had defeated Guthrum, he knew that the Vikings would return. But next time, he would make sure that Wessex was ready for them.

Alfred tackled the matter with the systematic intelligence that was characteristic of him. First came the question of 'why'? Why had God allowed pagan men to ravage the Christian kingdoms of the Anglo-Saxons? For Alfred did not believe in a universe of chance. Things happened for a reason, and he applied to recent events the same self-analysis that the Jews applied to their own history in the Bible.

Alfred saw the English as a new Chosen people, set apart by God for his purposes. But while the Jews came to understand their own history in terms of their falling away from the ancestral covenant they had made with God, Alfred came to a different conclusion with respect to his own people. It wasn't so much that they had failed morally (although the temptation to vice was always present and often consummated), but rather that they had failed by abandoning their previous commitment to learning and education. Whereas in the 7th and 8th centuries, Anglo-Saxon scholars such as Bede and Alcuin had been among the most learned men in the world, by Alfred's reign learning had fallen off so precipitously that the scribes for Canterbury Cathedral, the mother church of the whole country, were unable to produce texts in intelligible Latin. It was this failure to nurture their patrimony of learning, Alfred believed, that had caused God to remove his protection from the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.

So, having established the cause, Alfred set out to remedy it, starting with himself. He had only learned to read and write English when he was 12, better than for many other people but still a source of embarrassment to Alfred, and he could not read or write Latin, the language of scholarship. So, somewhere in his mid-30s, Alfred started to learn Latin, with the aim of achieving a high enough standard that he would be able to translate key Latin books into English. For Alfred had decided to embark upon a programme of education for his people, and to do that he recruited to his court the most able clerics he could find, from both Britain and abroad, men such as Asser, a Welshman, Plegmund, a Mercian, John from Saxony and Grimbald from France. Alfred's court was becoming an international institution.

Recognising that most of his people had neither the time nor the opportunity to learn Latin, Alfred and his court scholars set about translating the books 'most necessary for all men to know' into English. These included the *Dialogues* and *Pastoral Care* of Gregory the Great, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, *The Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius and the first 50 *Psalms*. These works are full of spiritual, moral and practical



Alfred working with his scholar clerics on the renewal of the kingdom

There weren't many early Medieval kings who took as much pleasure in reading as Alfred did

wisdom, from the *Consolation's* advice on how to deal with turns of fortune that leave you destitute – something Alfred himself was familiar with – to sound precepts for how a bishop should do his job in *Pastoral Care*.

Alfred sent a copy of *Pastoral Care* to every bishopric in the country and, being Alfred, was shrewd enough to guess that Gregory's pastoral advice might best be gold-plated with an earthly gift, so included a beautiful and valuable text pointer with each book. To ensure that the knowledge in these books reached beyond the episcopacy, Alfred also established a court school to teach not only his own children, but also the children of the nobility and even many among the common born. To recover from the ravages of the Vikings, Alfred decided it was best to foster a thorough cultural renewal.

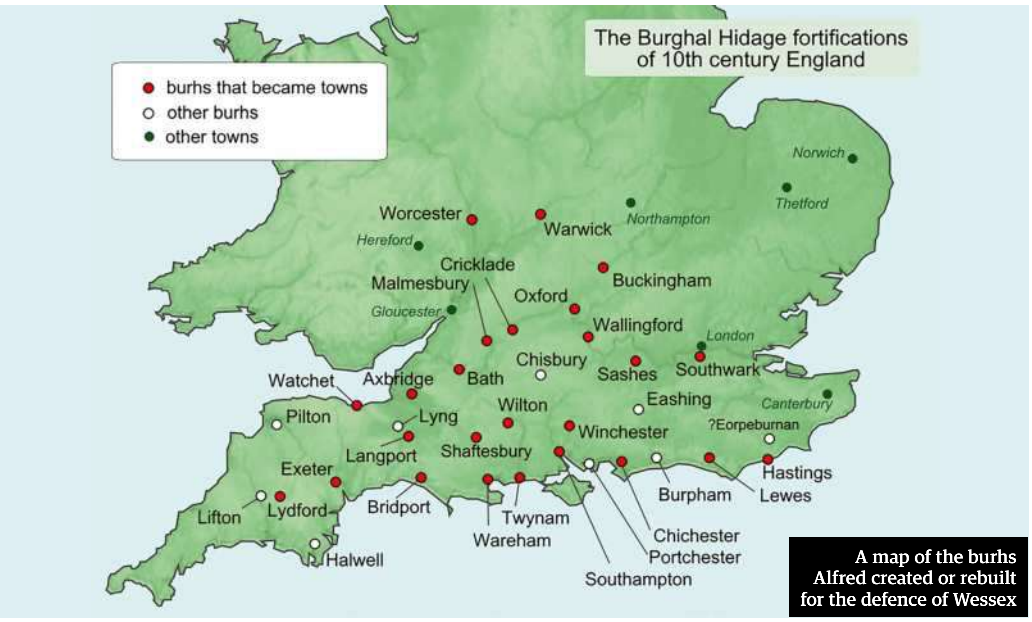
That Alfred, while burdened with all the duties of a king, should still find time in his day to translate Latin texts into English for the good of his people marks him out as truly exceptional among monarchs. There have been many great warrior kings, there have even been a few scholar kings, but Alfred is pretty well unique in being both.

While Alfred was working on the ultimate reason for why God had allowed the Vikings to ravage his kingdom, he knew well that he also had to improve the defences of Wessex. The key strategic advantage of the Great Heathen Army was mobility and surprise. When faced with the assembled forces of an Anglo-Saxon kingdom, a Viking force was far more likely to take refuge behind fortifications or even take to its boats than risk everything in a full-scale battle. But the time taken to assemble the fyrd, the free men of a district, meant that any half-competent Viking commander could raid and depart before anything much could be done about it. Even the Great Army, set upon conquest rather than raiding, used the same tactics; picking its time and place to strike, and often waiting for times in the calendar when its enemies were occupied with harvest or festivals. Alfred dug deep into the problem he faced, working down to first principles. He saw that to counter the mobility of a Viking army, he required forces that could be assembled quickly and move fast: he needed a mounted, standing army. This was a radical change from Anglo-Saxon practice, and one that would be far more costly to the magnates required to provide the mounted troops, but by 893, when the *Chronicle* describes in passing the results of the changes the king had inaugurated, Alfred had persuaded, cajoled, suborned and wheedled his nobility into line. Half the kingdom's warriors were kept on duty, with the other half held in reserve.

We know this force was mounted because, in its description of the actions and campaigns of the 890s, the *Chronicle* repeatedly refers to Alfred's forces riding after the Viking army. The horses were not the great war beasts of the high Medieval period but smaller animals, not that much larger than ponies, but ideal for transporting the relatively lightly armed warrior of the time.

By retaining half the warriors in reserve – that is, still living in their landholdings – Alfred also ensured the maintenance of the king's peace, for these warriors fulfilled the function of a police force as well as an army, deterring bands of brigands from raiding the small farming communities and religious establishments that dotted the land. Having men in place on the ground also meant that those on service were less likely to go running back to their homes to look after hearth and family.

But this mobile strike force was only half the solution. Even with a mounted army, the Viking mastery of amphibious operations meant they could still achieve first strike along the long coastline of Wessex, or along its navigable rivers. To protect against the sudden threat of the dragonships appearing on the horizon, Alfred had to improve the defences of his kingdom, and make


The Burghal Hidage fortifications of 10th century England
● burhs that became towns
○ other burhs
● other towns
Norwich
Thetford
Worcester
Warwick
Northampton
Hereford
Cricklade
Malmesbury
Oxford
Buckingham
Gloucester
Wallingford
London
Chisbury
Sashes
Southwark
Watchet
Axbridge
Bath
Eashing
Canterbury
Pilton
Lyng
Wilton
Winchester
?Eorpeburnan
Langport
Shaftesbury
Exeter
Hastings
Lewes
Burpham
Lifton
Lydford
Bridport
Twynam
Wareham
Chichester
Portchester
Halwell
Southampton

A map of the burhs Alfred created or rebuilt for the defence of Wessex them accessible to his people. To that end, he set about the most sustained programme of building since the Romans had conquered Britain seven centuries earlier. Alfred built fortresses, or burhs (from which comes 'borough'), across his kingdom, each of them carefully placed in a strategic location. But these were not simply defences, rather fortified towns, able to function economically and independently, yet able to combine with each other to form a defensive screen across Wessex. The 30 burhs were placed so that no one and nowhere in Wessex was more than 32 kilometres - or a day's march - away from a refuge.

The burhs defended harbours, rivers, Roman roads and the old trackways of Britain. Where Roman or Iron Age forts already existed, Alfred was perfectly happy to reuse and renovate what was on the ground, but where there was nothing he built from scratch. Although we don't know for certain, it seems likely that Alfred made use of his new standing army in the construction of the burhs since, as any commander knows, one of the most difficult of tasks is keeping bored men occupied and out of mischief - digging ditches and raising palisades would have served that end admirably. Most of the new burhs were built near Alfred's existing royal residences. These were already strongholds, but with essentially a fortified town near a royal estate, each helped to defend and support the other. A burh was not just a fortress, but a planned town - the people living in the town provided much of the manpower to defend the burh, and ensured that it would be defended and guarded. In some cases, such as at Winchester, Alfred was simply expanding what was already there but in others he created a town on a green-field site. For the burh to remain effective as a defensive bastion, it had to be a viable economic unit, and land was allocated to each for its supply and provision. But the building of protected settlements with concentrations of population had the result of kickstarting towns, and their resulting trade and wealth creation, into existence. Although there's little left of Alfred's original burhs, the street plan of somewhere like Wallingford, with its regular grid, probably dates from its foundation. If so, it shows how ambitious Alfred's building programme was, for Wallingford covered 100 acres (40 hectares): the king had created, from scratch, the second biggest town in his kingdom.

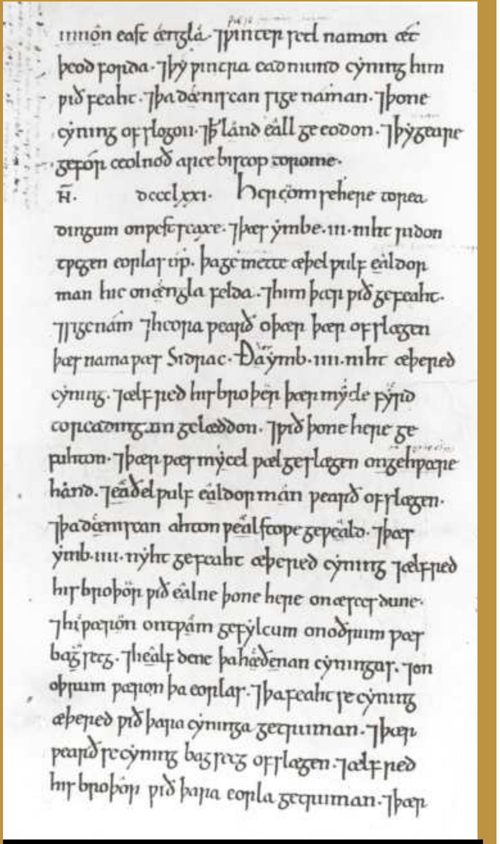
In order to support each burh, Alfred and his children, who continued and expanded the burhs as they slowly reconquered the land the Great Heathen Army had taken, created a system of administration that ensured sufficient land and resources were allocated to each burh, both for its maintenance and its defence. Now Wessex was ready. Let the Vikings come, if they dared.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

Along with everything else, Alfred also set up the first continuing record of the country's history

All early Medieval kings were acutely conscious of their image, for glory was the best advertising for a king: it deterred enemies and attracted followers. To that end, Alfred commissioned the compilation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. This tale of years, with its bald statements of battles and deaths, is a crucial historical document but, as such, must be viewed carefully.

The history of the time before Alfred's reign was patched together from a variety of sources, notably Bede and a variety of existing chronicles detailing the histories of Mercian, Kentish, South Saxon and West Saxon kingdoms, and after its compilation copies were dispatched through the land that then formed the basis for ongoing chronicling. There are eight extant manuscripts, each different, and the disentangling of sources, influences and histories is an ongoing scholarly pursuit. Although there is little comment in the Alfredian portion of the *Chronicle*, the choice and, in particular, the omissions were part of the image Alfred and his circle wanted to project of a West Saxon king as the culmination of Anglo-Saxon history and the bulwark against pagan invaders. Still, where it has been possible to check the *Chronicle* independently, it has proved a reliable historical guide, so the previous notion that it is pure Alfredian propaganda has been quietly put to one side. It would be better regarded as an honest record, but one informed and formed by its point of view and time of composition.



innon eastængla ⁊ ƿinter setl namon æt
þeodforda ⁊ þy ƿintra eadmund cyning him
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dingum on ƿestseaxe ⁊ þæs ymbe ·iii· niht ridon
tƿegen eorlas up· þa gemette æþelƿulf ealdor
man hie on englafelda ⁊ him þær ƿið gefeaht·
⁊ sige nam ⁊ heora ƿearð oþer þær ofslagen
þæs nama ƿæs Sidrac· Ða ymb ·iiii· niht æþered
cyning· ⁊ ælfred his broþer þær mycle fyrd
to readingum gelæddon· ⁊ ƿið þone here ge
fuhton· ⁊ þær ƿæs mycel ƿæl geslægen on gehƿæþre
hand· ⁊ eadelƿulf ealdorman ƿearð ofslægen·
⁊ þa dæniscan ahton ƿælstoƿe geƿeald· ⁊ þæs
ymb ·iiii· nyht gefeaht æþered cyning ⁊ ælfred
his broþor ƿið ealne þone here on æscesdune·
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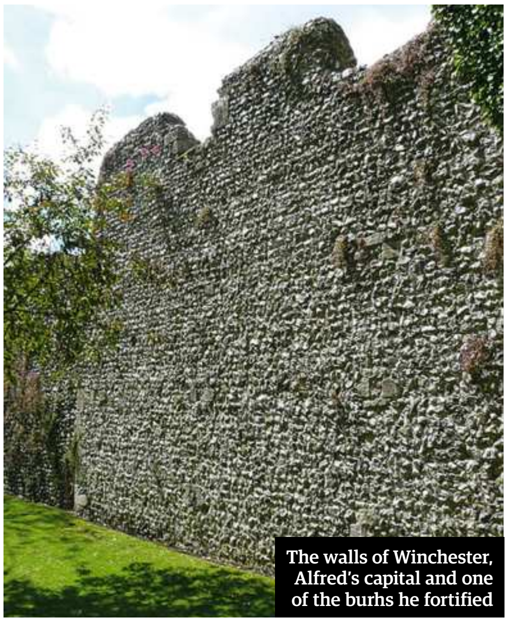
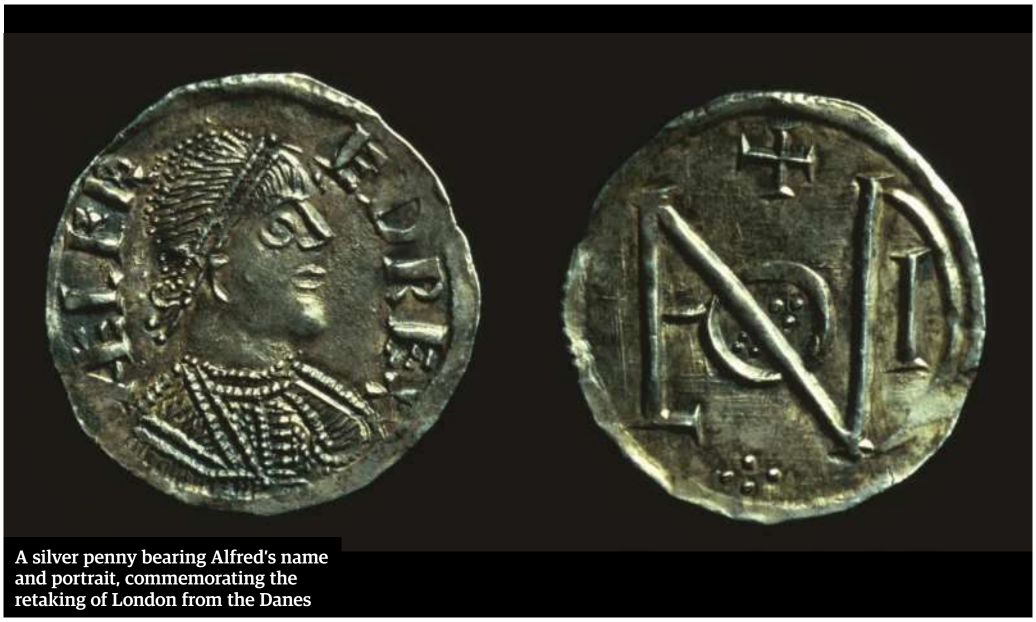
bagsecg· ⁊ healfdene þa hæðenan cyningas· ⁊ on
oþrum ƿæron þa eorlas· ⁊ þa feaht se cyning
æþered ƿið þara cyninga getruman· ⁊ þær
ƿearð se cyning bagsecg ofslægen· ⁊ ælfred
his broþor ƿið þara eorla getruman· ⁊ þær

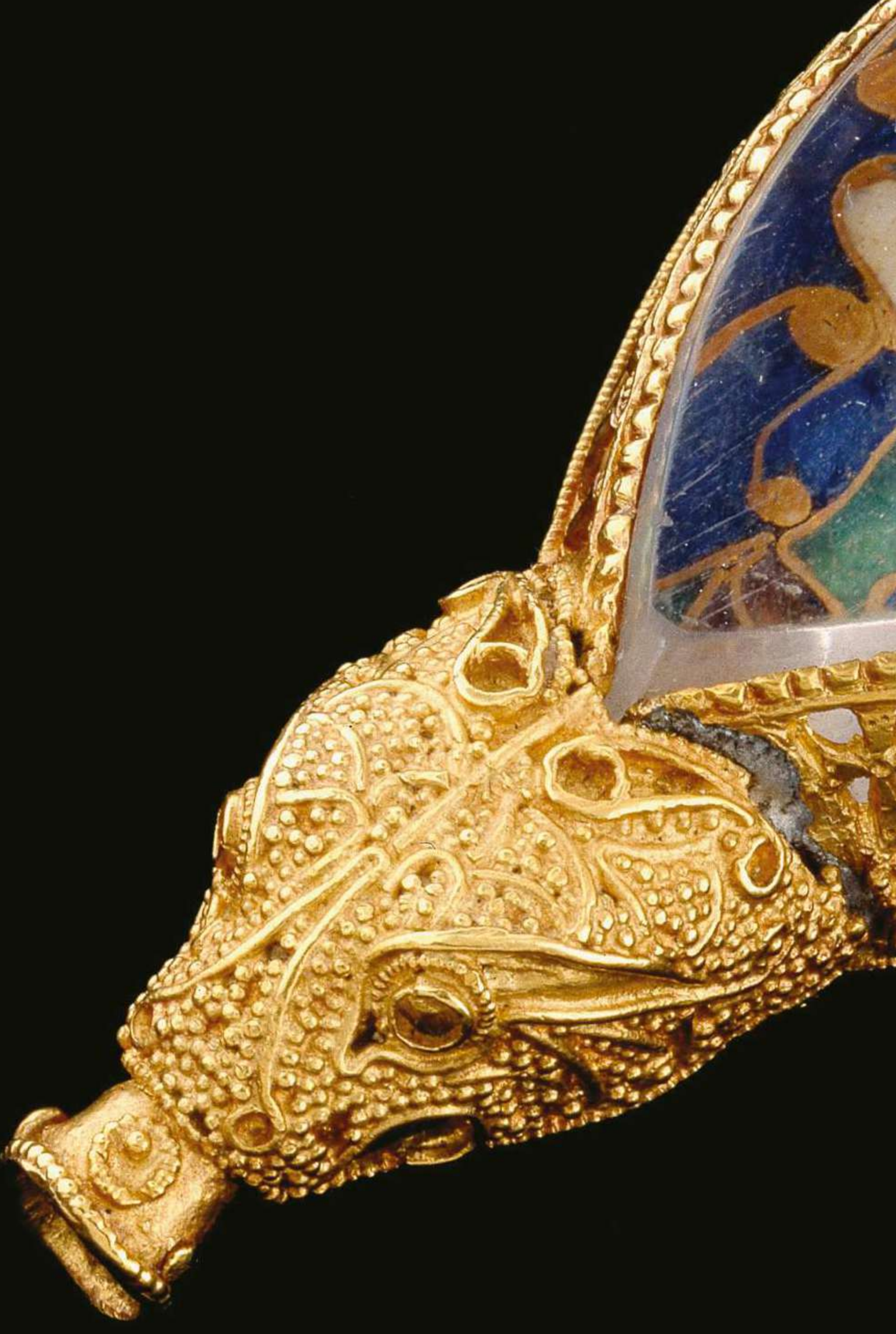
A page from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* telling of the battles Alfred and his elder brother fought against the Vikings at Reading and Ashdown

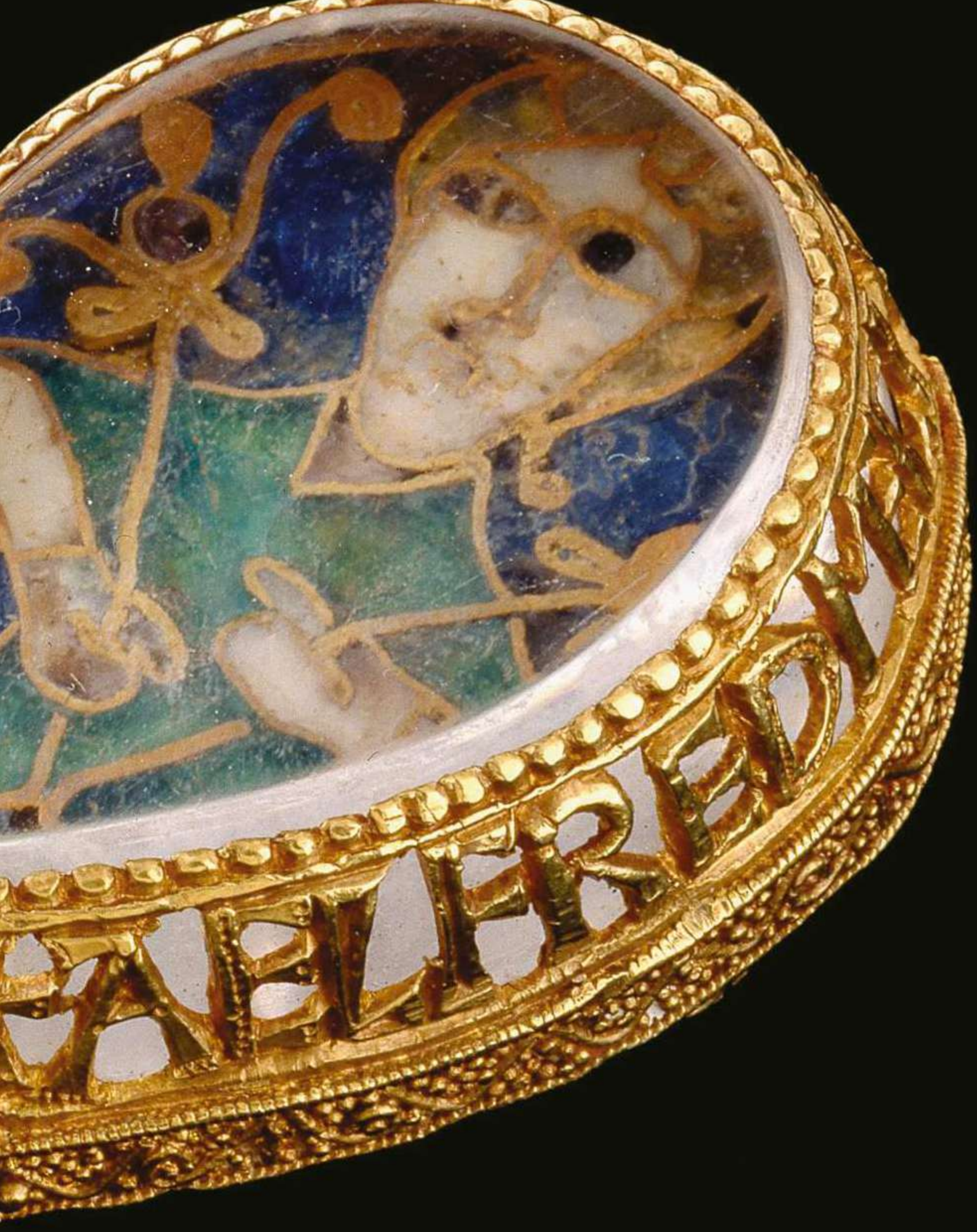


The walls of Winchester, Alfred's capital and one of the burhs he fortified



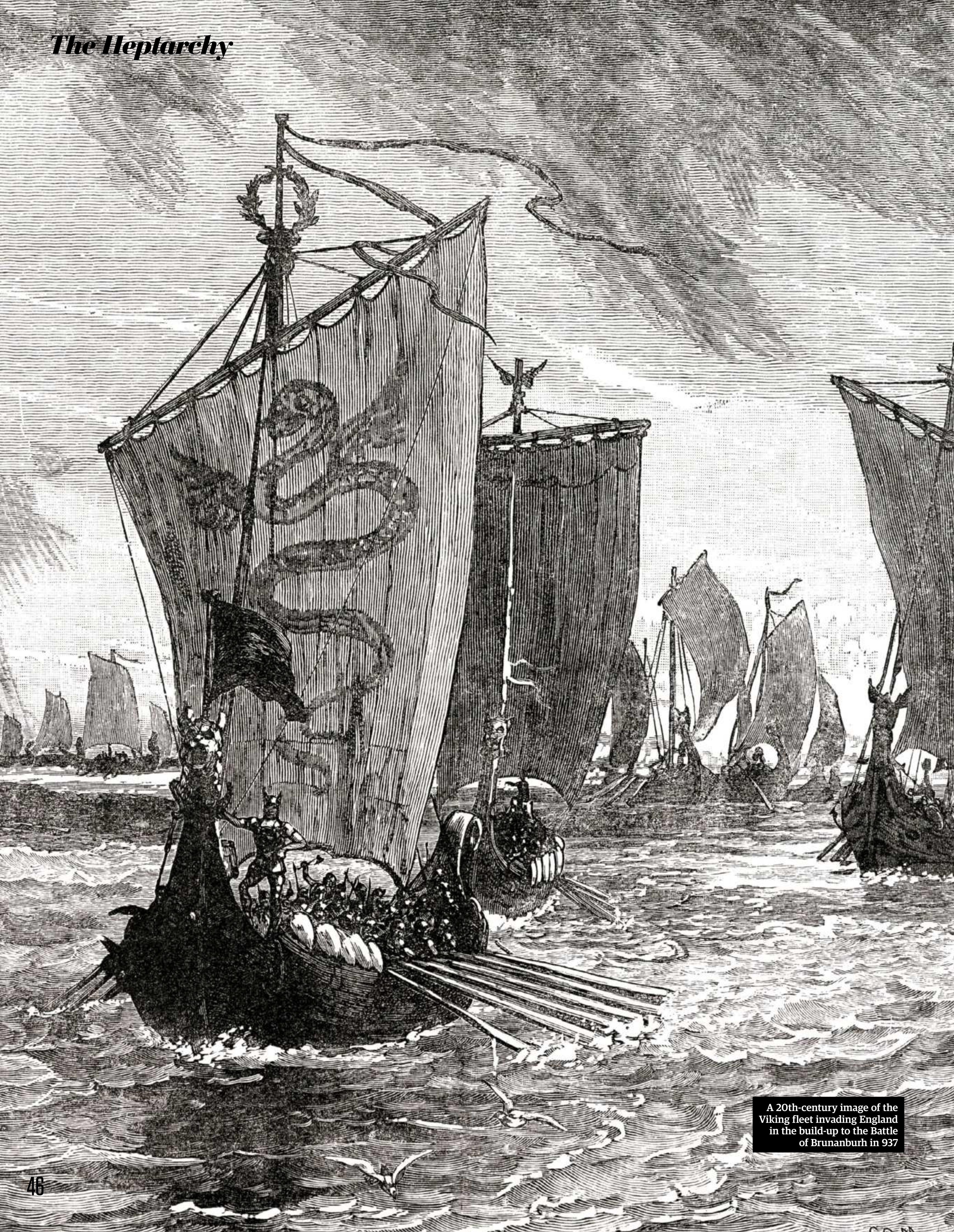
A silver penny bearing Alfred's name and portrait, commemorating the retaking of London from the Danes





The Alfred Jewel

Just over six centimetres in height, three centimetres in width and one centimetre deep, the Alfred Jewel is one of the most important royal Anglo-Saxon relics. We know who commissioned the piece thanks to its inscription – 'AELFRED MEC HEHT GEWYRCAN', or 'Alfred ordered me to be made' – and historians are pretty sure they know what it was used for. When Alfred the Great distributed manuscripts around his kingdom, they were often accompanied by aestels, which were used to point at the text, and it's thought that this is what the Alfred Jewel was.



A 20th-century image of the Viking fleet invading England in the build-up to the Battle of Brunanburh in 937

VIKING SETTLEMENT

The development of the Danelaw

Written by **Wayne Bartlett**

With the defeat of Guthrum's army by Alfred, a frontier was established, running approximately from Wessex and the western half of Mercia (the English Midlands) with the Anglo-Saxons to the southwest of it and the Vikings to the northeast. To a large extent, this reflected the status quo, with Viking-conquered territories such as East Anglia, much of Mercia and Northumbria remaining in Norse hands. An uneasy period of truce followed, which was threatened and indeed broken from time to time, but despite this it managed to remain substantially intact for a while. Many settlers emigrated from Scandinavia, and they were more interested in building a sustainable existence in England than living the life of a raider.

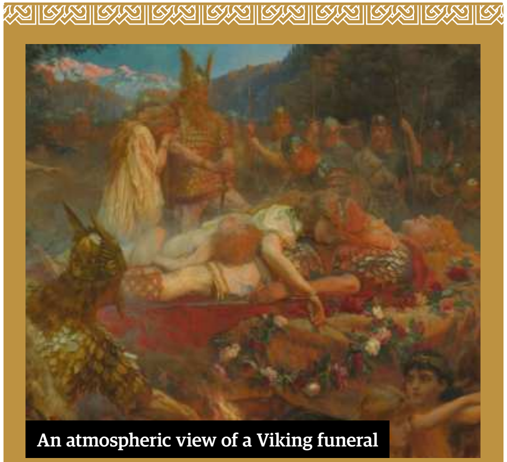
This is not to say that the frontier between the two zones was frozen, and one important change occurred in 886 when Alfred conquered Lundenwic (London), which had previously been in Viking-held Mercian territory. It was rapidly increasing in importance, though it was several centuries away from taking over from Winchester in terms of political precedence in southern England. This followed Viking raids in the previous year, which had given Alfred the opportunity to conquer it with legitimate reason. The treaty that was subsequently agreed between the Vikings and Alfred set the frontier along the line of Watling Street, the old Roman road, and that of the rivers Thames, Lea and Ouse.

For a while, Anglo-Saxon England, in the southwestern part of the region, and the lands held by Vikings to the northeast co-existed peacefully enough. There were occasional Viking raids on England but they mainly came from new Viking incursions from the Continent or Ireland rather than from Viking-held territory in England. There were certainly rules in place governing relations between the two domains of England that now existed, but they were largely those of two equivalents rather than of one party dominating the other.

Guthrum, who had been baptised as part of the peace treaty with Alfred, adopted a completely different approach than the swagger of the stereotypical Viking warlord he had previously adopted. He used the 'Christian name' of Æthelstan, and for the rest of his reign as ruler of Viking Mercia and East Anglia (Northumbria was in different hands at the time) continued to use this name on the coinage that he issued. Baptism into the Christian faith was an increasingly common move across the Viking world as former pagan warlords began to see the political advantages that Christianity offered. The Viking-held territories were later given the generic name of Danelaw (although this name did not start to be used until the early 11th century, over a century after the first permanent Viking settlements in England were established). As the name suggests, in this part of England, Danish law and customs were used, in contrast to the convention in Anglo-Saxon territory. However, over time the two systems came to influence each other.

Although the initial settlement of England by the Vikings was undoubtedly bloody and violent, the situation stabilised significantly as Viking settlers began to assimilate with the indigenous population. While Viking leaders may have assumed the role of local rulers, they still needed the pre-existing population to work alongside them, to tend the land and generate taxes (often paid in kind rather than currency). So although we cannot be sure, in the absence of detailed records, that there was not the occasional brutal warlord ruthlessly exploiting the local population, it is far more likely that the two populations in the Danelaw routinely (and for the most part, peacefully) co-existed.

A Viking coin-maker at work at the Jorvik Centre in York



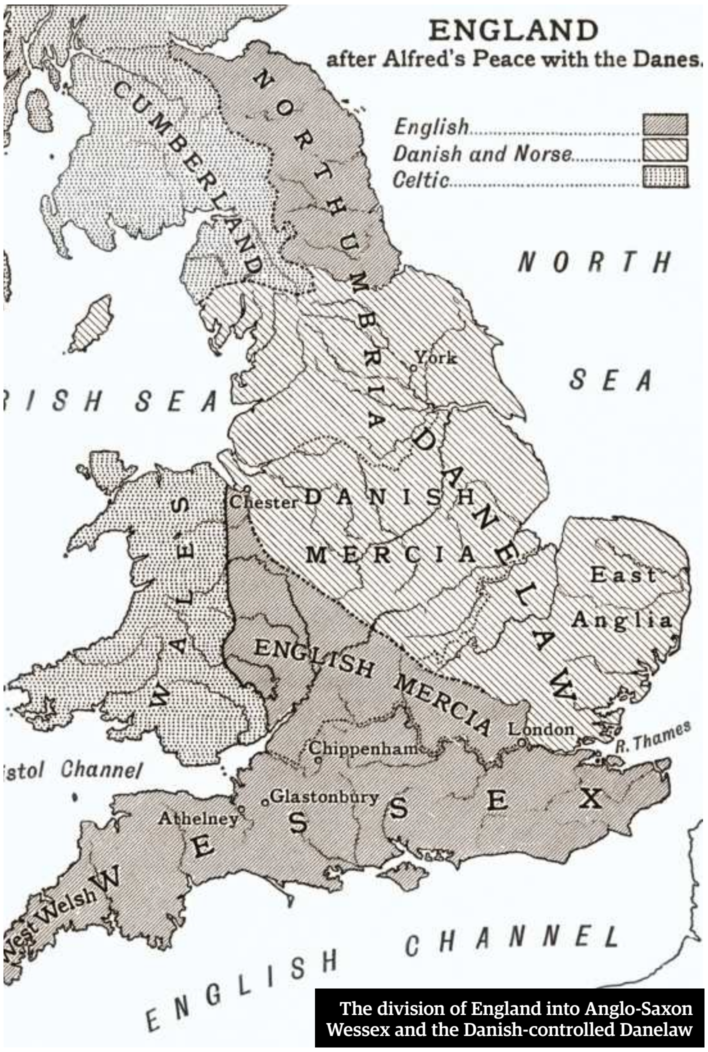
An atmospheric view of a Viking funeral

Erik Bloodaxe

The last Viking king of York?

The last Viking king of York was called Erik. Later sagas suggest that this was a man famed as a ferocious Viking warrior known evocatively as Erik Bloodaxe. Erik Bloodaxe had been involved in a bitter fight for supremacy in Norway with his half-brother, Hákon – a battle that he ultimately lost. Erik Bloodaxe therefore went into exile and lived his life as an adventurer overseas.

The last Viking king of York was almost certainly called Erik, but modern historians are not convinced this is necessarily the same man as Erik Bloodaxe – Erik is, after all, a common enough Norse name. Other accounts have Erik Bloodaxe living out his life raiding in Spain and suggest that he died there. The Erik who became king of York, whether or not he was of the Bloodaxe variety, seems to have come to power with the active connivance of the then archbishop of York, the Anglo-Saxon Wulfstan. But his grip on power was tenuous and he was ejected from the city in 954. Soon after, he was killed in what appears to have been an ambush at Stainmore, a pass in the Pennines, the 'stony moor' on the frontiers of Yorkshire, Durham and Cumbria.



The division of England into Anglo-Saxon Wessex and the Danish-controlled Danelaw

> "They pushed forward the boundaries of Anglo-Saxon territory by progressively taking over settlements in the Danelaw"

The Viking invasions had an unexpected role in the development of a unified country that would be called England. Following Alfred's death, the baton was picked up by two extraordinary people, his son Edward (known sometimes as 'The Elder') and his daughter Æthelflaed, who had married the ealdorman of Mercia. Between them, they pushed forward the boundaries of Anglo-Saxon territory by progressively taking over settlements in the Danelaw. Following a crushing victory in 910 at Tettenhall (near Wednesfield – 'Woden's Field') close to Wolverhampton, where Edward and Æthelflaed between them led a combined army from Wessex and Mercia that decimated their Viking opponents, the frontier crept forward as previously Viking-held settlements like Leicester and Derby fell into the hands of their opponents.

However, even when the Danelaw gradually returned to Anglo-Saxon hands, the rulers of Wessex (who became the dominant force in England) wisely allowed the settlers in the Viking-populated territories to maintain their own customs and laws, so a distinct identity developed, even if politically it came to be part of Anglo-Saxon England. A number of major towns emerged as urban life started to develop. The major ones – Leicester, Derby, Nottingham, Lincoln and Stamford – became known as the 'Five Boroughs'; it is notable that all but the last of these remain as county towns in modern England. Each of these was built around a fortress with its own jarl (Scandinavian for 'lord', which is linked with the English word 'earl'). These became significant commercial centres as the Viking settlers shifted their focus from raiding to trading. These settlers left their mark, not least in the English language and on the English countryside. A number of everyday modern English words have their roots in Scandinavian origins: 'anger', 'husband', 'sister' and 'egg' are just some examples of how deeply Norse is woven into

A reconstruction of a Viking settlement in a Scandinavian landscape

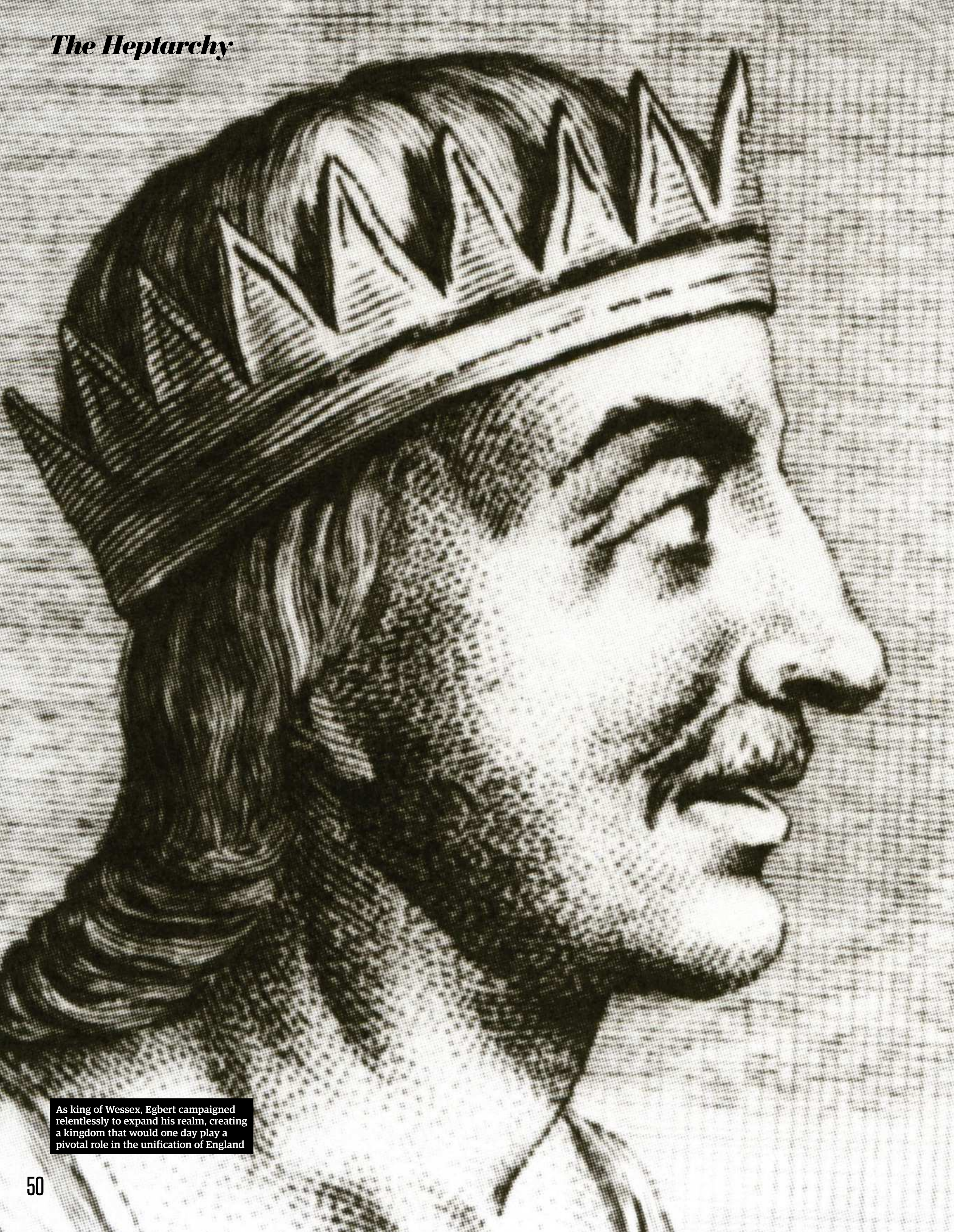
English. The inclusion in a place name of '-thorpe' (Scunthorpe, Cleethorpes) or '-by' (Derby, Whitby, Grimsby) is a clear sign of a settlement that was in Viking-held territory during this period. So Viking influence lives on into contemporary life, albeit in ways that are now often forgotten.

Rather than resenting the Anglo-Saxon takeover in the reign of Edward the Elder and his successors, the Viking inhabitants of the Danelaw seem to have come to terms with it well enough, at least in the region south of York. A decisive moment came in the year 937, when a massive army descended on Anglo-Saxon territory from the north. The army was formed of the combined forces of men from Scotland, Strathclyde (then a British territory in what is now northwest England and southwest Scotland) and a Viking force which had sailed over from Ireland. The English king Æthelstan (not to be confused with King Guthrum, who had adopted the same name a few decades earlier) won a decisive victory over this coalition at Brunanburh, somewhere in the north of England. At his side were men from not only Wessex and Mercia, but also those of Viking descent from the Danelaw. They had looked at the stability they had achieved under Anglo-Saxon rule and, perhaps in some cases to their surprise, found that they preferred it to the old unstable ways of the Viking world that was on offer from the alliance they fought against.

However, one part of Viking-held territory in England remained stubbornly resistant to Anglo-Saxon rule long after other parts of the Danelaw accepted it. This was the region of Northumbria, centred on York (Viking Jorvik). This maintained strong links with Viking Dublin and on a number of occasions would-be kings came over the Irish Sea in a sometimes successful (sometimes not) bid to be ruler of both. Northumbria had always, to an extent, been distinct from the rest of Anglo-Saxon England, probably a situation that was encouraged by its geographical remoteness. It is quite likely that the Northumbrians of the time were no more comfortable at the thought of being ruled by kings from Wessex far to the south than they were with Viking government.

Northumbria was composed of two sub-divisions; Deira in the south, centred around York and, further north around Bamburgh, Bernicia. Deira was the main centre of Viking territory in the north while Bernicia often remained as an independent Angle-held territory with a ruling dynasty whose head was almost invariably called Uhtred (made famous in modern times by Bernard Cornwell's historical novels on the subject). Jorvik became the bustling centre of the Viking North. Modern excavations have revealed extensive reminders of the Viking era here, especially in the Coppergate area of the city. These reveal that this was an overcrowded and unsanitary area to live in, but local merchants clearly found compensation in the living they were able to make from it. There is widespread evidence of the manufacture of combs, for example, which at the time was an important industry. Despite the humble houses that archaeology has revealed, Jorvik became something of a powerhouse.

The wealth of Jorvik made it an attractive target for Anglo-Saxon kings in the south of England, and it changed hands on several occasions during the first half of the 10th century. Several times they succeeded in conquering it (for example during the reign of Æthelstan) but then lost it again in the uncertain period that often followed the death of an Anglo-Saxon king and the almost inevitable succession crisis that followed. Eventually, the demise of a Viking ruler called Erik in 954 marked the end of the Viking kingdom in Northumbria. This appeared to be the end of an independent Viking territory in the north, but they would return to England several decades later in a new and even more terrifying guise.



As king of Wessex, Egbert campaigned relentlessly to expand his realm, creating a kingdom that would one day play a pivotal role in the unification of England

THE HOUSE OF WESSEX

England's longest-lasting family that saw the nation invaded, reconquered and unified

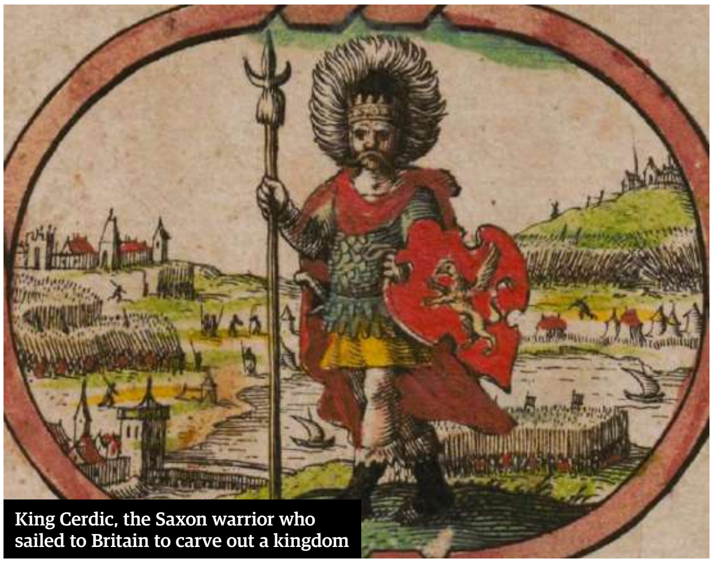
Written by **Charlie Ginger and Edoardo Albert**

The historic House of Wessex - also known as the House of Cerdic in honour of its Germanic founder - has its roots in the ambitions of a Saxon who would one day wage a relentless war across Britain with the aid of his son in a ruthless quest for territory and plunder, a conflict that some believe pitted him against none other than King Arthur.

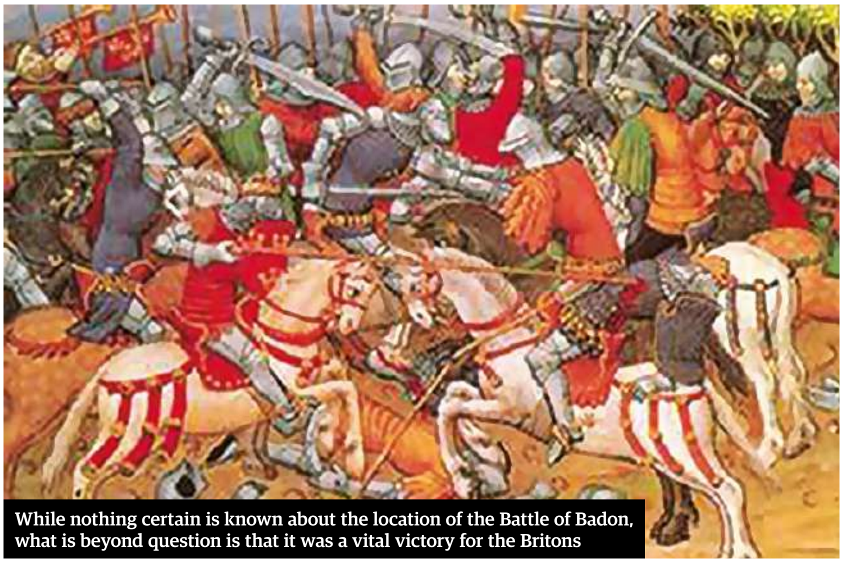
It's believed that the fearsome Cerdic landed on the coast of Hampshire in what is today southern England with his equally ambitious son Cynric in 495 CE aboard one of five Saxon ships. He had little time to adjust to his new surroundings, for according to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,* his host was forced to do battle with a horde of natives, who in turn were duly routed.

While it is safe to assume that both father and son will have been confronted with fierce opposition, they managed to expand their sphere of influence before solidifying their new kingdom of Wessex. In fact, so formidable were they that it is written that they scythed down a king by the name of Natanleod and slew 5,000 of his men in 508 CE. Even defeat at the Battle of Mount Badon eight years later (allegedly to a force led by King Arthur) could not blunt the Saxon expansion permanently.

With Sussex, Kent, East Anglia and swathes of Yorkshire falling to the Saxons, Cerdic left behind an imposing realm when he died in 534 CE. Succeeded by an impressive line of kings, each intent on leaving their mark, the ferocious father of the House of Wessex established a line that would last for centuries and included men such as Egbert (who would forge a kingdom so influential that it eventually brought about the unification of England) and of course the most famous name from all of Saxon Britain: Alfred the Great, king of Wessex and the Anglo-Saxons.



King Cerdic, the Saxon warrior who sailed to Britain to carve out a kingdom

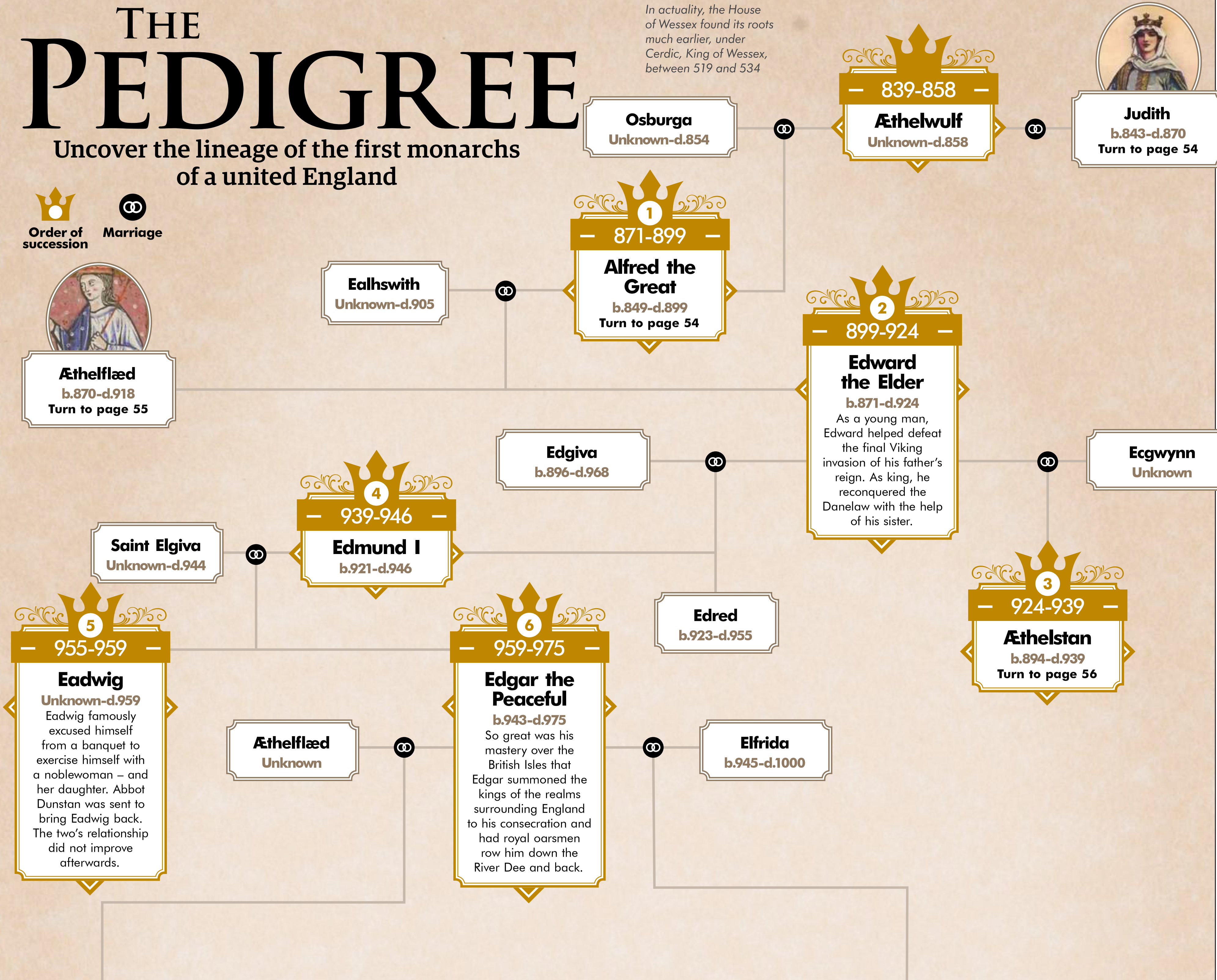


While nothing certain is known about the location of the Battle of Badon, what is beyond question is that it was a vital victory for the Britons

THE PEDIGREE

Uncover the lineage of the first monarchs of a united England

In actuality, the House of Wessex found its roots much earlier, under Cerdic, King of Wessex, between 519 and 534



Osburga
Unknown-d.854

Æthelwulf
839-858
Unknown-d.858

Judith
b.843-d.870
Turn to page 54

Ealhswith
Unknown-d.905

Alfred the Great
1
871-899
b.849-d.899
Turn to page 54

Æthelflæd
b.870-d.918
Turn to page 55

Edward the Elder
2
899-924
b.871-d.924
As a young man, Edward helped defeat the final Viking invasion of his father's reign. As king, he reconquered the Danelaw with the help of his sister.

Edgiva
b.896-d.968

Ecgwynn
Unknown

Saint Elgiva
Unknown-d.944

Edmund I
4
939-946
b.921-d.946

Edred
b.923-d.955

Æthelstan
3
924-939
b.894-d.939
Turn to page 56

Eadwig
5
955-959
Unknown-d.959
Eadwig famously excused himself from a banquet to exercise himself with a noblewoman – and her daughter. Abbot Dunstan was sent to bring Eadwig back. The two's relationship did not improve afterwards.

Æthelflæd
Unknown

Edgar the Peaceful
6
959-975
b.943-d.975
So great was his mastery over the British Isles that Edgar summoned the kings of the realms surrounding England to his consecration and had royal oarsmen row him down the River Dee and back.

Elfrida
b.945-d.1000

The House of Wessex

7
– 975-978 –
Edward the Martyr
b.962-d.978

9
– 1013-1014 –
Sweyn Forkbeard
b.960-d.1014

8
– 978-1013 –
1014-1016
Æthelred the Unready
b.968-d.1016
Turn to page 57

Ælfgifu of York
b.970-d.1002

Emma of Normandy
b.985-d.1052
Turn to page 58

11
– 1016-1035 –
Cnut the Great
b.995-d.1035

Ælfgifu of Northampton
b.990-d.1040

12
– 1035-1040 –
Harold Harefoot
b.1016-d.1040

13
– 1040-1042 –
Harthacnut
b.1018-d.1042

Eadwig
Unknown-d.1017

10
– 1016-1016 –
Edmund Ironside
Unknown-d.1016
Turn to page 59

Edith
b.992-d.1017

Edward the Exile
b.1016-d.1057

Agatha
b.1030-d.1070

Edgar the Outlaw
b.1051-d.1126

14
– 1042-1066 –
Edward the Confessor
b.1004-d.1066
The childless Edward made no public proclamation of who he wanted as heir, leaving the throne to be contested when he died in 1066.

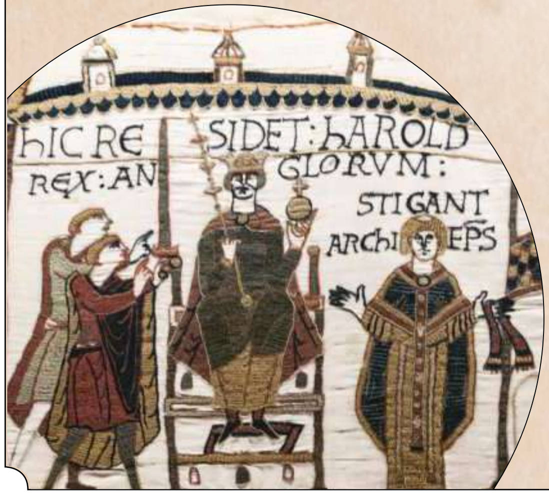
Edith of Wessex
b.1025-d.1075

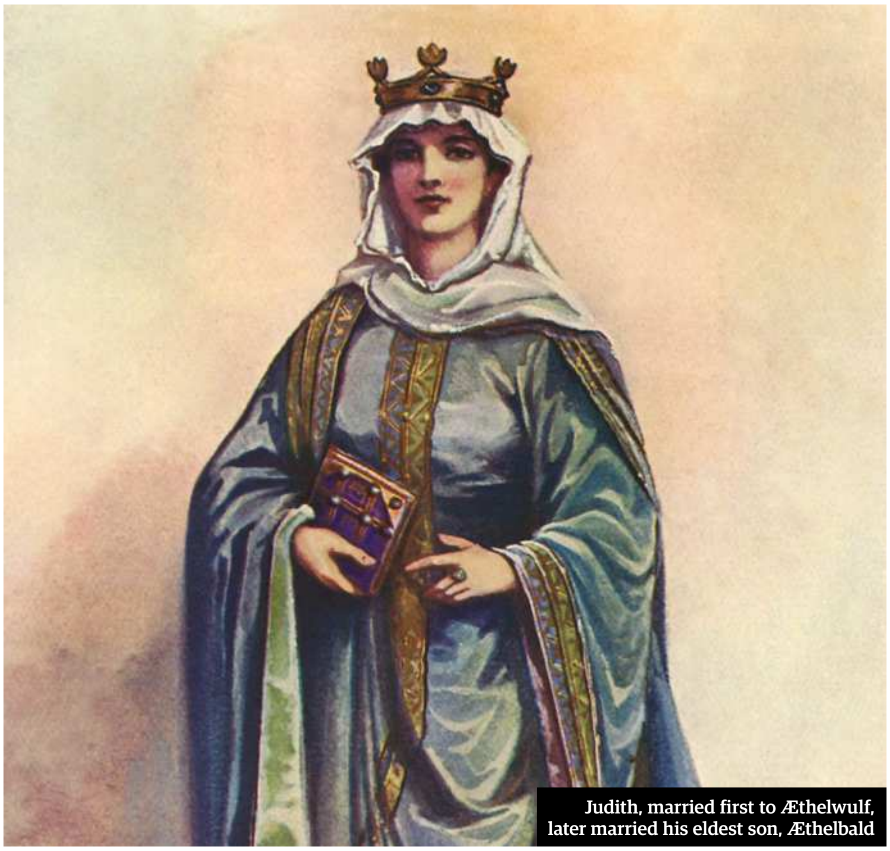
Godwin, Earl of Wessex
b.1001-d.1053

Gytha Thorkelsdottir
b.997-d.1069

15
– 1066-1066 –
Harold Godwinson
b.1022-d.1066
While his sister was married to the king, Harold himself had no direct claim on the throne. Nevertheless, he claimed it when Edward died.

The coronation of Harold Godwinson, as depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry





Judith, married first to Æthelwulf, later married his eldest son, Æthelbald

Judith

b.843-d.870

THE QUEEN WHO MARRIED FATHER & SON

King Æthelwulf's wife, the mother of Alfred and his brothers, died around 854, leaving the king without a queen. So he found one: Judith, daughter of Charles the Bald, king of the Franks. No matter that she was barely a teenager and Æthelwulf probably in his 50s: this was a political marriage to cement an alliance and to sprinkle some Carolingian glamour – Charles the Bald was the grandson of Charlemagne – on the House of Wessex.

However, two years after the marriage, Æthelwulf died. With her husband dead, 15-year-old Judith could have returned to her father but, displaying the independence of spirit that would mark out the rest of her life, Judith did no such thing. She wanted to remain a queen and there was one way of doing so: she married Æthelbald, her late husband's son and the new king of Wessex. The decision outraged the ten-year-old Alfred and Church leaders considered the marriage incestuous. But Judith would not back down. However, Æthelbald was not as long lived as his father and died in 860; Judith was a widow again.

Judith returned to her father's court, as neither marriage had produced any children. She was welcomed back by Charles, who cast around for a new husband. But Judith was unwilling to wait; early in 862, she eloped with Baldwin, Count of Flanders. Her father was furious. He petitioned the pope for their excommunication, and they were cast from the Church. But this resourceful couple marshalled diplomatic support and had the excommunication lifted. In the end, Charles accepted Baldwin. Judith had two sons by Baldwin and, bringing the story almost full circle, many years later, one of her boys married Alfred's daughter, Ælfthryth.

Alfred the Great

b.849-d.899 ♛ King of Wessex: 871-899

KILLING FOR THE CROWN

There's only one English king called 'the Great' and it's Alfred. But when Alfred was growing up, he would never have expected to become king: he had four older brothers. However, when the Vikings landed in East Anglia in 865, intent on conquest, being king would prove to be a shortcut to an early death.

With three of his brothers dead, Alfred lined up alongside his last remaining brother, King Æthelred, to inflict the first significant defeat on the Great Heathen Army at the Battle of Ashdown on 8 January 871. But by April, Æthelred was dead – possibly from wounds suffered – and Alfred was king. In this year of battles, Alfred fought nine major engagements against the Vikings, losing most of them, but managing to salvage his men and his life. For the Vikings, who fought for profit, Alfred's resistance was cutting too deeply into their margins. They cut a deal.

If Alfred thought he'd bought peace, he was disabused of this notion five years later when the Vikings launched renewed attacks. By 876, Wessex was the last kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons: the Vikings had conquered Northumbria, East Anglia and Mercia. Alfred fought them to a treaty but, as he settled down to celebrate Christmas and the New Year of 878, the Vikings launched a surprise attack on his estate at Chippenham and Alfred had to flee for his life.

The last kingdom had fallen.

Hiding out in the marshes of the Somerset Levels, Alfred embarked on a series of hit-and-run raids against the Vikings. Then, in May 878, Alfred emerged from hiding and summoned the men of Wessex. They came, in their hundreds and thousands. The Vikings finally had Alfred in the open. Win this battle and the country was theirs.

On a date between 6 and 12 May, Alfred faced the Great Heathen Army at Edington in Wiltshire. It was possibly the single most crucial battle in English history, and Alfred won. What Alfred did after victory gave further sign of how different he was from the usual run of kings. When the Viking leader, besieged and starving, surrendered, Alfred did not execute him on the spot. Instead, he let him live, on condition that he be baptised – with Alfred standing as his godfather – and return to the rule of East Anglia as his vassal.

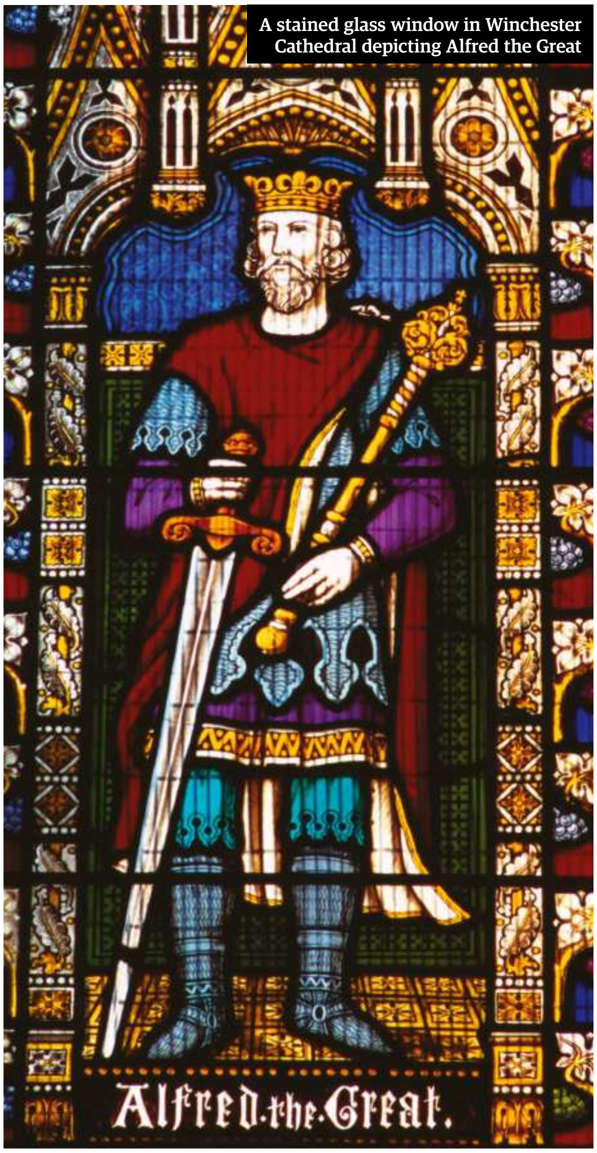
Although he had neutralised this threat, Alfred knew that there would be others, so he set about the renewal and restoration of a devastated kingdom. To protect his people against further raids, he created a network of fortified towns and strongholds, placed throughout his kingdom to guard roads and rivers, and so arranged that all his subjects were within a day's march of safety. He organised a standing army and created a navy with ships made to his own design. What's more, Alfred set about a programme of cultural and spiritual renewal, bringing in

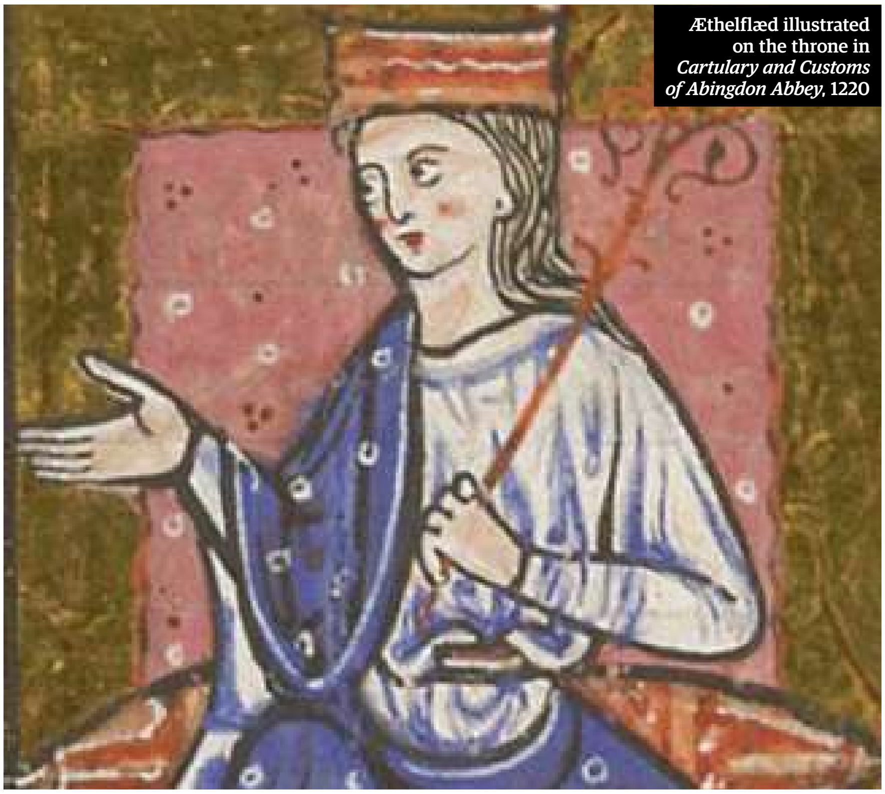
> "What Alfred did after victory gave further sign of how different he was"

scholars from far afield to teach and instituting a series of translations of important works into English, so that all might read them. Setting his own mind to the grind of translation, Alfred learned Latin and set to translating himself, sometimes inserting his own reflections into the translation. Thus we have the king's own thoughts on the art of kingship and the responsibilities of power – you would search for hundreds of years previously and afterwards before finding another king who applied himself in such a fashion.

And, yes, the Vikings did return, in 893. But Alfred's reforms, and the armies led by him, his able son, Edward, and his son-in-law, Æthelred, ruler of the Mercians, harried the Viking armies, leaving them no safe place to settle so that, after 896, they gave up their fruitless campaigning and withdrew.

In 899, Alfred, England's greatest king, died.


A stained glass window in Winchester Cathedral depicting Alfred the Great
Alfred the Great.


Æthelflæd illustrated on the throne in *Cartulary and Customs of Abingdon Abbey*, 1220

Æthelflæd

b.870-d.918 ♛ Lady of the Mercians: 911-918

THE WARRIOR QUEEN

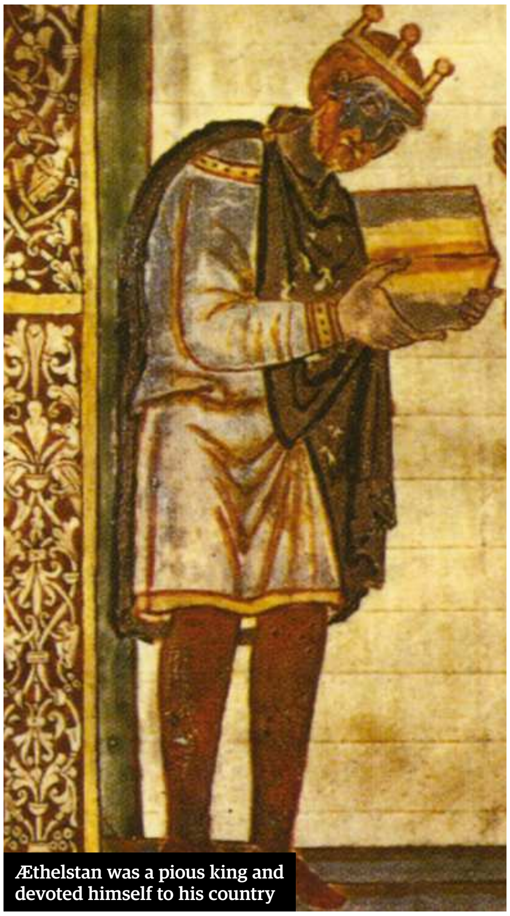
Alfred was an extraordinary man and he had extraordinary children, in particular his eldest son, Edward, and his first-born child, Æthelflæd. Sister and brother grew up through the wars against the Vikings and knew it would be their part to continue the struggle.

Alfred married his daughter to the man he'd entrusted with the rulership of Mercia, under Alfred's overlordship. But when the lord of the Mercians was incapacitated by illness in the early 10th century, Æthelflæd became de-facto ruler in his place and, when he died in 911, she was accepted as the ruler of Mercia, recorded in contemporary charters as Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians. Thus Æthelflæd became the only woman who ruled an Anglo-Saxon kingdom.

With her brother, Edward, king of Wessex following Alfred's death in 899, the siblings launched the systematic reconquest of the Danelaw, those parts of England that Alfred had ceded to the Vikings as theirs to rule. Æthelflæd prepared for the campaign by extending the network of fortified strongholds and towns that her father and brother had made through Wessex into Mercia. Then, from 909 onwards, Æthelflæd and Edward maintained constant pressure on the Danes, establishing control by erecting new strongholds as they advanced.

But Æthelflæd, like her father, was no mere warrior: she advanced learning and scholarship throughout her kingdom, endowing and protecting monasteries throughout her reign.

In 917, Æthelflæd and Edward beat back Viking counterattacks, and then Æthelflæd's forces took Derby, the first of the Five Boroughs of the Danelaw to fall to the Anglo-Saxons. Next year, Leicester surrendered and York pledged to Æthelflæd, but the Lady of the Mercians died – on 12 June 918 – before she could take the city. Æthelflæd's daughter succeeded her but Edward deposed his niece and took direct control of Mercia. England was struggling towards unity.



Æthelstan was a pious king and devoted himself to his country

Æthelstan

b.894-d.939 ♛ 924-939

THE FIRST KING OF ENGLAND

Æthelstan was Alfred the Great's grandson. The old king saw something in the boy and had him invested when still very young with cloak, belt and sword. Æthelstan was Edward the Elder's oldest son, but by a woman little attested in our sources: Æthelstan may have been illegitimate or his mother of low birth. As such, there was rivalry between him and Edward's children by his two queens, and Æthelstan was brought up at the court of Edward's remarkable sister, Æthelflæd.

On Edward's death, Æthelstan succeeded to the throne of Mercia but a half brother, Ælfweard, was to be king of Wessex - but Ælfweard died 16 days after his father. Not surprisingly, there was some resistance in Wessex towards accepting Æthelstan as king, particularly after such a conveniently timed death. But Æthelstan's decision not to marry - thus ensuring his successor would come from the descendants of Edward's children with his queens - eased his acceptance. The decision may also have reflected Æthelstan's character: in common with his grandfather, Æthelstan was an intensely religious man.

But it is Æthelstan's achievement in bringing all of England under his rule that marked him out as an exceptional king. Æthelstan took the Viking-ruled north, centred on York, in 927, making him the first king to rule all the old Anglo-Saxon kingdoms: Wessex, Mercia, East Anglia and Northumbria - the first king of England.

However, the kings of the surrounding lands eyed this rising power nervously and allied to bring Æthelstan down. Constantine, king of the Scots, Olaf Guthfrithson, king of Dublin, and Owain, king of Strathclyde, attacked England. The forces met at the Battle of Brunanburh in 937. It was a decisive victory for Æthelstan and for the idea of England. If Æthelstan had lost, the newly united country would have been dismembered. Instead, England endured.

Elfrida

b.945-d.1000

THE WICKED QUEEN

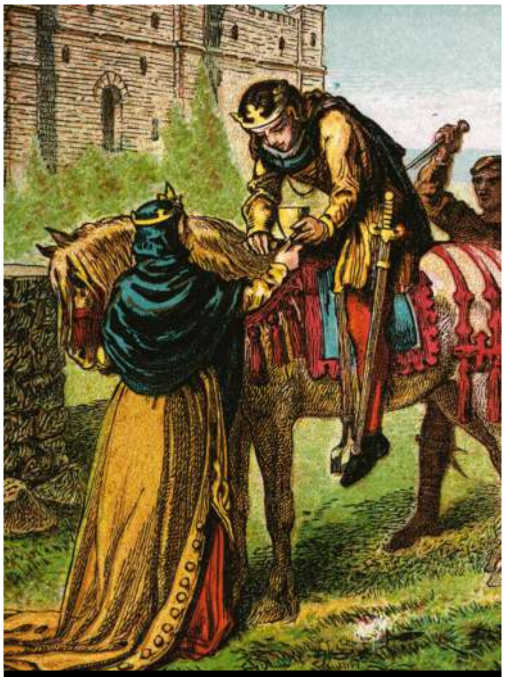
Was Elfrida the wicked queen of later legend? Certainly, her name might have been blackened by those attacking her son, Æthelred, but enough doubt exists to suggest that she was far from blameless in the bloody, murderous events of her time.

One chronicler tells of how King Edgar, hearing of Elfrida's beauty, sent a retainer to see if she was quite as beautiful as people said. The retainer, smitten, married Elfrida himself while telling the king that the reports of her beauty were greatly exaggerated. But when word reached Edgar that Elfrida was indeed the beauty she was reputed to be, he announced he would visit. Elfrida's husband asked her to make herself ugly, but Elfrida did no such thing and the king was besotted in turn, arranging for the husband to meet with a convenient accident during a hunt. Widowed, Elfrida was free to marry the king.

But Edgar already had a son from a previous marriage. So when Elfrida gave birth to a son, Æthelred, in 968, his half-brother, Edward, who was six years older, stood in the path to the throne.

Edgar died in 975; Edward was 13, Æthelred just seven. Not surprisingly, Edward was crowned king. But three years later, when Edward came to visit his stepmother and half-brother at Corfe Castle, their stronghold in Dorset, the young king was pulled from his horse and murdered. The earliest accounts are sparse in their detail, although all agree Edward was hurriedly buried, without any royal honours.

Did Elfrida plot the death of the king? Certainly Æthelred was too young to have been involved. The chroniclers who accused Elfrida of the crime wrote many years later, but with Edward dead, Æthelred was the only possible monarch. For contemporaries, it must have seemed the lesser of two evils to draw a veil over Elfrida's possible involvement in regicide, rather than implicate the king. But there is one telling detail that points to Elfrida's guilt: she had legal authority over the case, yet no one was ever tried for Edward's murder.



Elfrida hands Edward a cup after his journey, while her men approach, knife to the ready, from behind

So it is likely Æthelred came to the throne by murder. The blood guilt of this crime was played out through the following generations, culminating in the conquest of 1066.

Æthelred the Unready

b.968-d.1016 ♛ 978-1013, 1014-1016

ENGLAND'S WORST KING… PROBABLY

The nickname that has applied to Æthelred for centuries comes from the Old English, Unræd, and means not that he was unprepared, but that he was ill-advised, and is a play on his Christian name, which means 'noble counsel'. The people always preferred to place the blame for the calamities that befell them through Æthelred's long reign on the men around the king rather than the king himself. Æthelred, ever one to pass the buck, was likely all too happy to allow his councillors to take the blame. He even managed to escape the blame for how he came to the throne in the first place.

On the death of his father, Edgar the Peaceful, in 975, Æthelred's elder half brother, Edward, took the throne. Edward reigned for three years until he made the mistake of visiting his half-brother and step-mother, Elfrida, at Corfe Castle. When Edward arrived, he was greeted by Æthelred's men but then, before the king could dismount, they grabbed his arms, immobilising him, and stabbed Edward to death. Æthelred was only ten, so could not have been responsible for Edward's murder. Besides, there weren't any other alternatives. Æthelred became king, first ruling with the support of a council of leading men and his formidable mother.

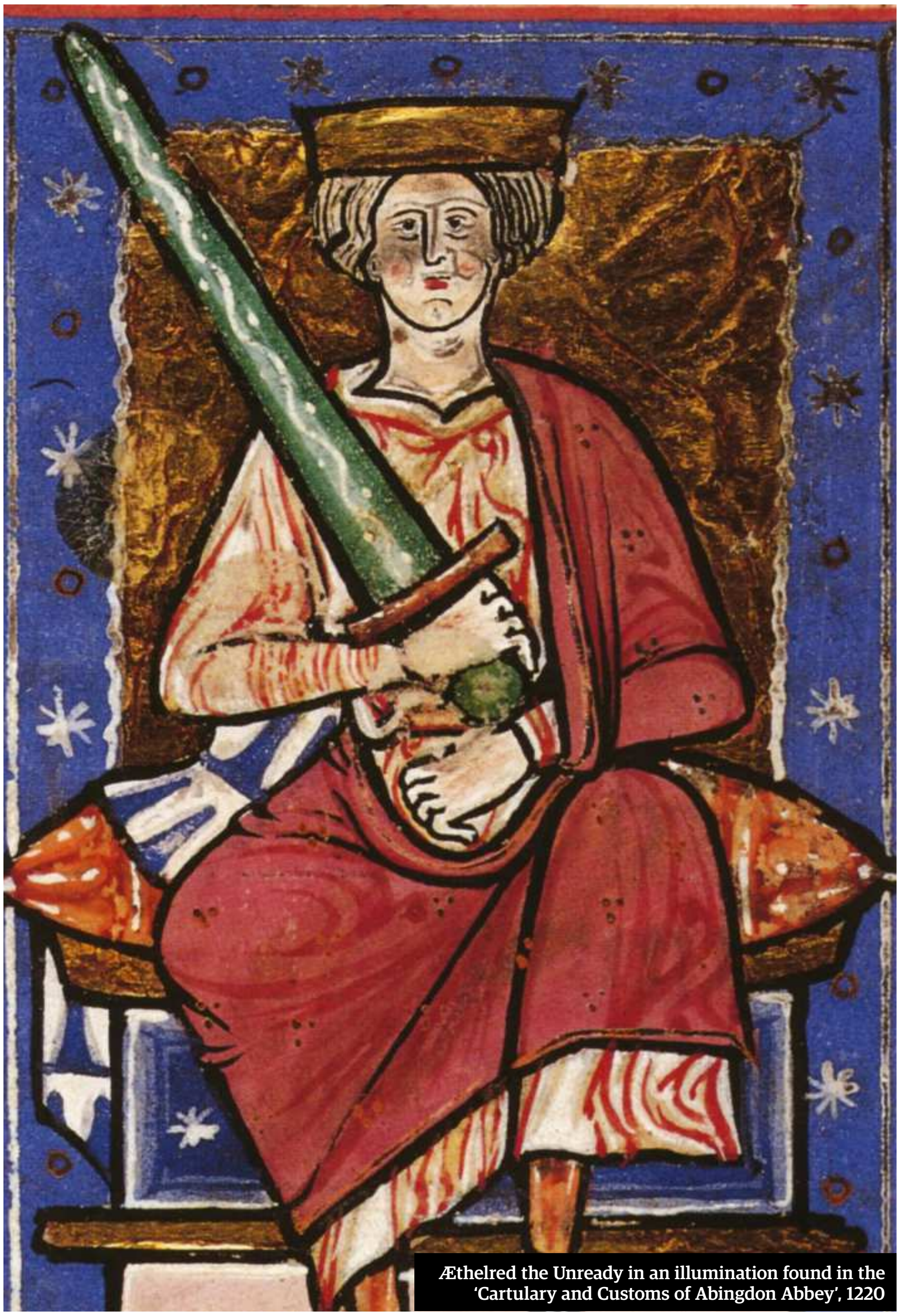
The early years of Æthelred's reign saw considerable reform and, indeed, if left in peace he might have gone down in history as a good king save for the circumstances of his taking the throne. But this was not to be the case. After a hundred years of peace, the Vikings were back.

Following small raids in the 980s, a major fleet appeared in 991 and defeated an English army near Maldon. Showing that the English, even then, liked nothing better than glorifying a valiant defeat, the battle was commemorated in the Old English poem *The Battle of Maldon*, which tells how the liege men of Byrhtnoth made the decision to fight to the death alongside their fallen lord.

One defeat was enough. Æthelred paid off the Vikings. This first time, the cost of peace was 10,000 pounds. The Danes took the money and then returned for more next year and the year after. Second time round, the cost had risen to 22,000 pounds The third time, it was 24,000. The fourth, 36,000. The fifth, 48,000. Æthelred had inherited the most efficient tax-gathering government in Europe, and he milked the realm to pay the Danes. But where others before him had paid Vikings to buy time, Æthelred appeared to have no other strategy: Æthelred never faced the Vikings in battle.

What he did do was enter an alliance with Duke Richard of Normandy to try to deny Viking fleets safe harbour across the Channel: to cement the alliance, the recently widowed Æthelred married the duke's sister, Emma, starting the relationship with Normandy that would play out, two generations later, in the second conquest of England.

The second, because by 1013, the English were a thoroughly demoralised people, ripe for invasion, and King Sweyn Forkbeard of Denmark duly obliged. Æthelred fled into exile. But then, on 3 February 1014, Sweyn Forkbeard, with the country beneath his whiskers, died. Æthelred returned, promising to rule better, but the murder of two earls by his favoured councillor, Eadric Streona, showed nothing had changed. Sweyn's son, Cnut, returned at the head of a new invasion fleet and Æthelred finally did something for his country: he died, leaving his son, Edmund Ironside to lead the fight.



Æthelred the Unready in an illumination found in the 'Cartulary and Customs of Abingdon Abbey', 1220

> "One defeat was enough. Æthelred paid off the Vikings"

Emma of Normandy

b.985-d.1052

THE THREE-TIME QUEEN

Emma married Æthelred in 1002, becoming queen of England and producing two sons, Edward and Alfred. When Æthelred fled the country in the face of the Viking invasion, Emma left with her boys too, although, in a telling commentary on her marriage, she made her own way to Normandy. When Æthelred died, his son, Edmund Ironside, led the fight against Cnut. But when Edmund died, Cnut needed to shore up the legitimacy of his claim to the throne, and what better way to do that than by marrying the queen?

> "Power mattered to the queen, and she was willing to make sacrifices"

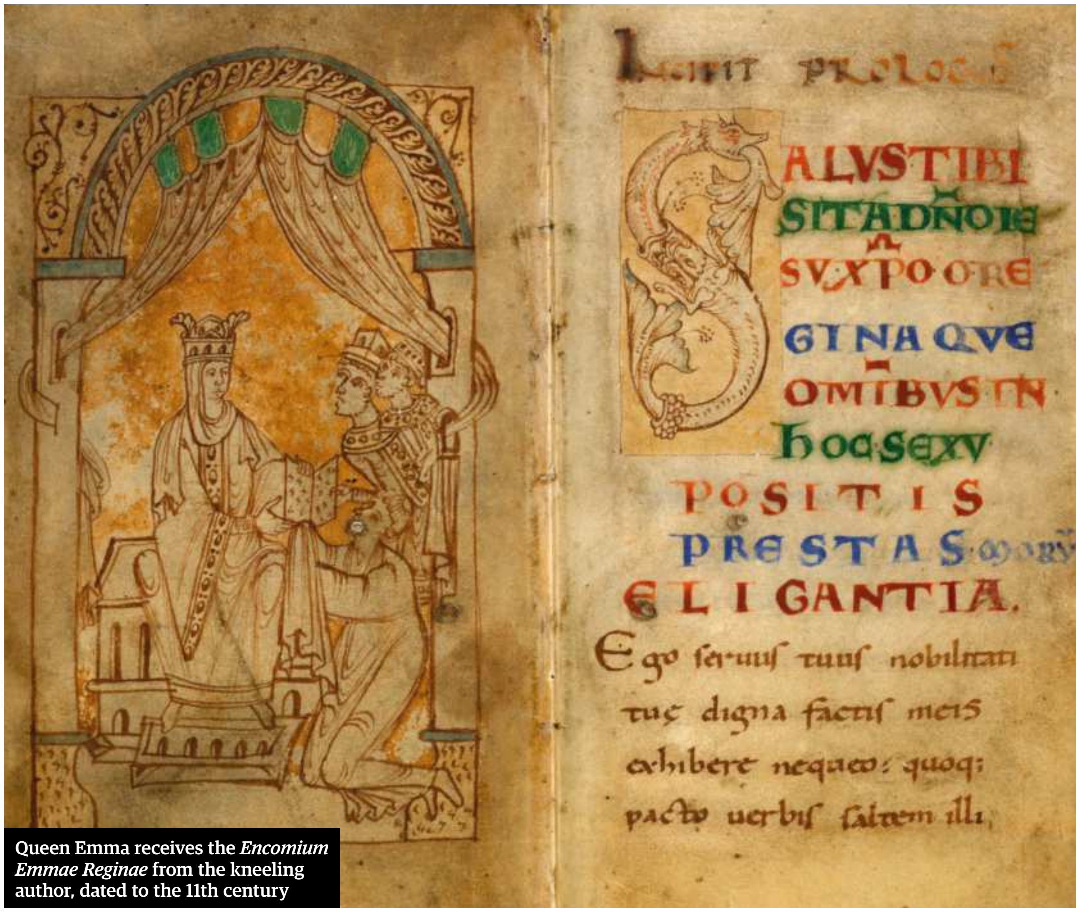
Many years later, Emma commissioned her version of these events; by her telling, Cnut wooed her back to England and into marriage with gifts and promises. Given the political nature of such a match, Emma may not have had much of a choice in the matter, but power mattered to the queen, and she was willing to make sacrifices to keep it. The children of her first marriage, Edward and Alfred, were left behind in Normandy while Emma set about producing a new heir to the throne with Cnut. According to her book, the political marriage became a true partnership and contemporary records bear this out: Emma had far higher status as Cnut's queen than she had ever enjoyed as Æthelred's wife.

When Cnut died in 1035, the succession seemed clear: surely it would go to Harthacnut, his son with Emma. But Cnut had produced another son, Harold Harefoot, with his first wife, and Harold Harefoot was on hand to claim the throne, while Harthacnut sought to defend his interests elsewhere in Cnut's northern empire. Emma's struggle on her son's behalf was helped by Earl Godwin, an Englishman whom Cnut had raised to one of the highest ranks in the land. But when Godwin defected to Harold Harefoot's side, Emma remembered that she had another two sons, just over the Channel, who also had claim on the throne. Edward tried, but his tentative invasion failed. Then it was Alfred's turn. Earl Godwin met him, feasted the young prince and his followers, put them up for the night and then set upon them: Alfred's men were variously sold into slavery, murdered, mutilated, blinded and scalped. Alfred himself was not killed but his eyes were put out, wounds from which he failed to recover.

With Godwin on his side, Harold Harefoot became king and Emma went into exile again, seeking refuge not in Normandy - where presumably Edward might have had some pointed questions about his mother's recent conduct - but in Flanders. Ever the survivor, she swiftly returned to favour when Harold Harefoot died and Harthacnut took belated control of England in 1040. Having reacquainted herself with Edward, Emma worked for his return to England in 1041. And return he did but, remarkably, he returned to act as co-king alongside his half-brother, with Emma the third person of a ruling trinity. This arrangement was likely made to shore up Harthacnut's increasingly unpopular reign.

Harthacnut died in 1042 and, in 1043, Edward moved against his mother, appearing unexpectedly at her power base in Winchester and depriving Emma of her treasures. Edward, for one, had not forgotten what had happened to his younger brother, nor the way Emma had abandoned him in Normandy. Although Emma was allowed to retain her base in Winchester and Edward accepted her back to court, her power had been broken.

Besides, there was another power behind Edward's throne: Earl Godwin and his family. Despite Godwin's role in his brother's death, Edward married his daughter. From Winchester, Emma, that consummate player of the political game, must have thought the future set, but it did not work out like that. Emma did not live to see the final playing out of the events set in motion by her marriage to Æthelred. She died in 1052, the wife and mother of kings.



Incipit prologus

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exhibere nequeo: quoq;
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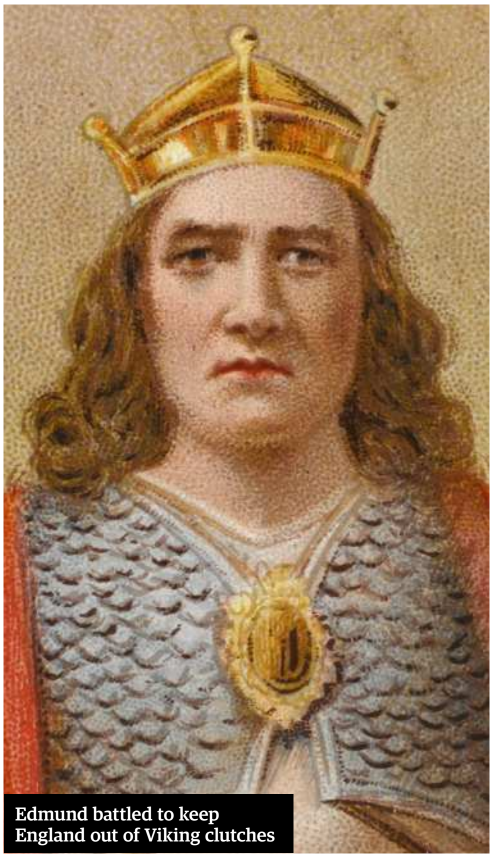
Queen Emma receives the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* from the kneeling author, dated to the 11th century



Edmund battled to keep England out of Viking clutches

Edmund Ironside

b.993-d.1016 ♕ 1016

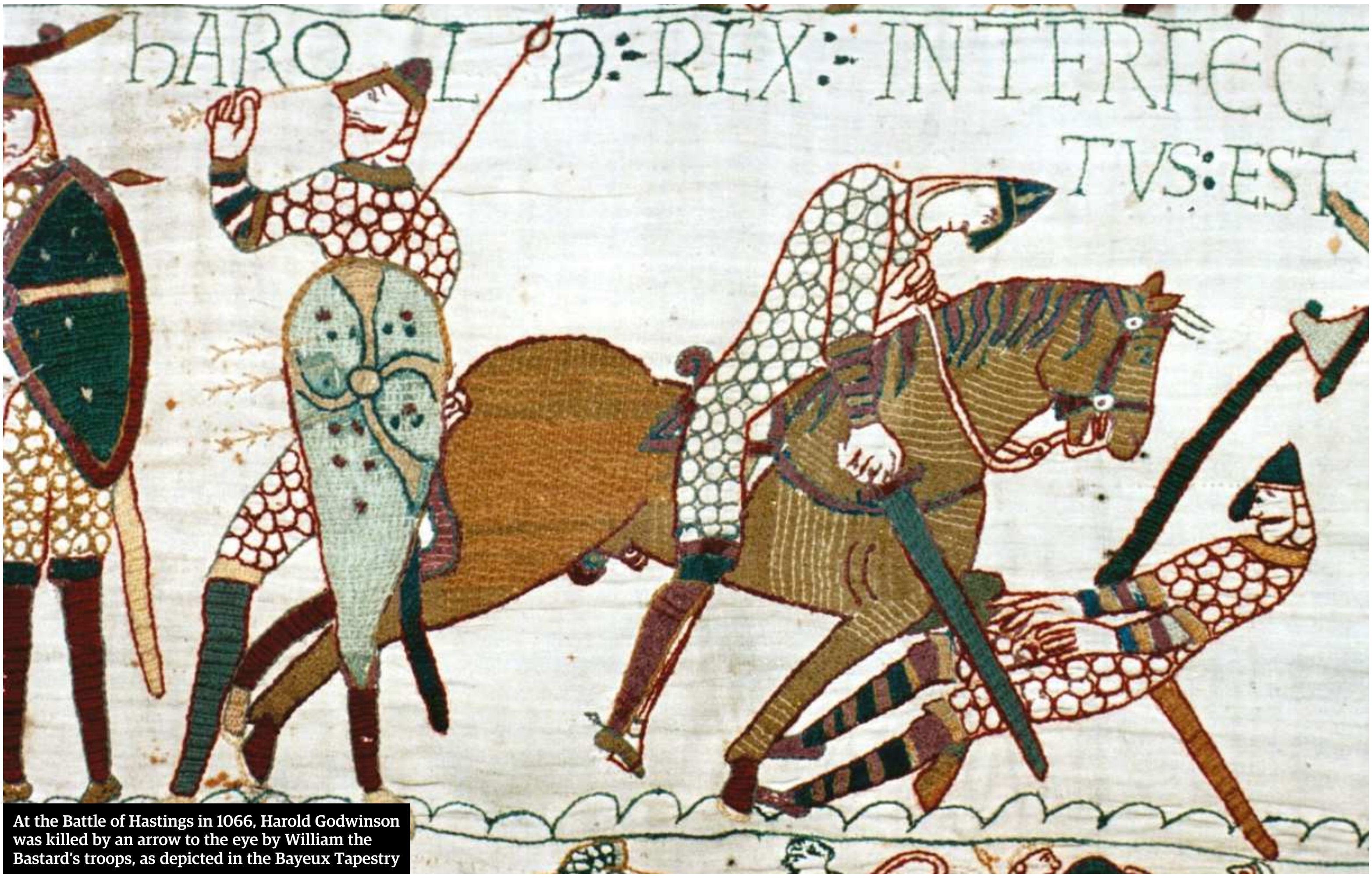
THE KING WHO FOUGHT AND LOST

Edmund was Æthelred's third son by his first wife. When Æthelred remarried Emma of Normandy and produced a further two boys, Edmund must have been concerned they would claim the throne ahead of him. But, first, there had to be a throne to claim.

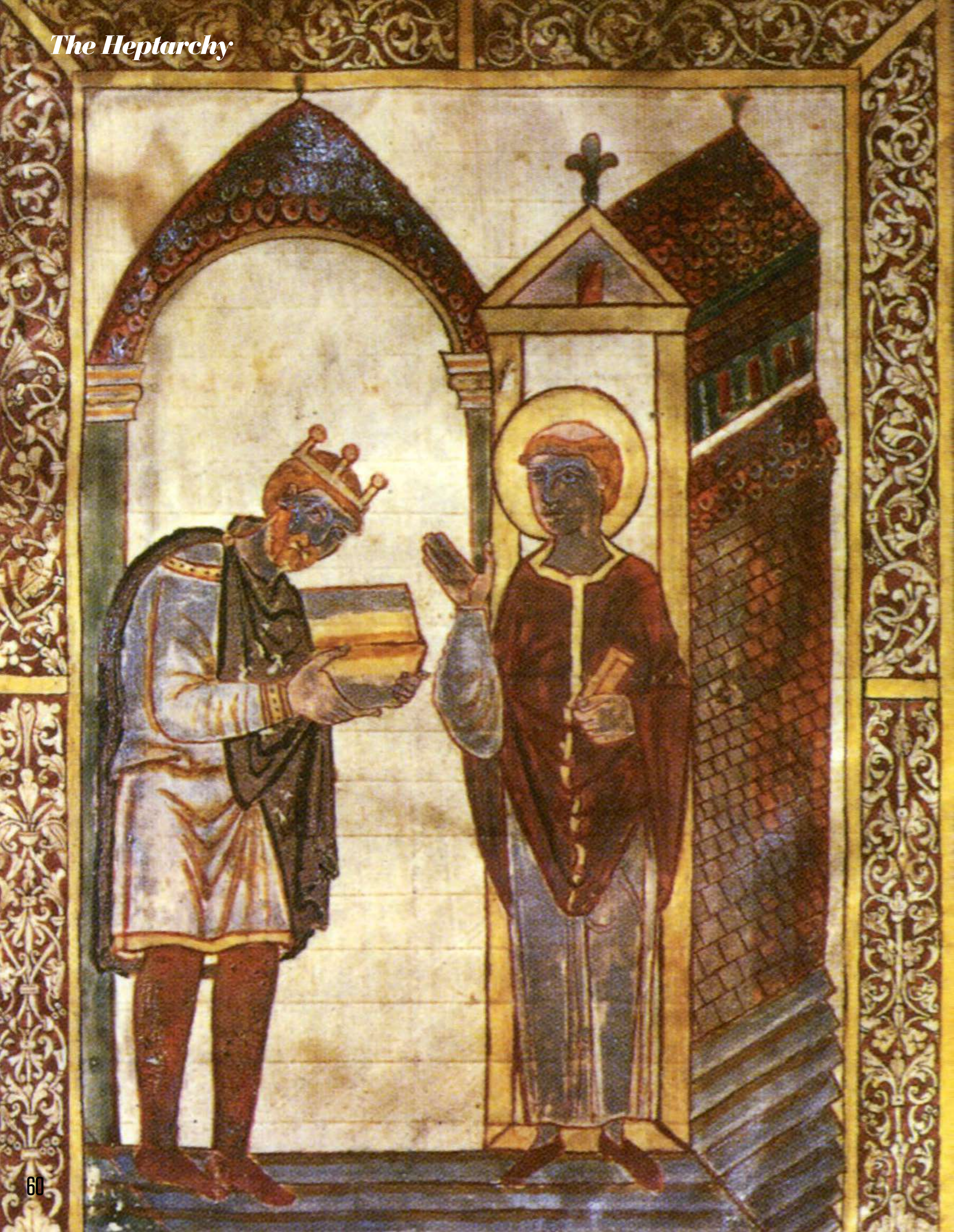
When Æthelred fled into exile after Sweyn Forkbeard's invasion in 1013, Edmund stayed behind. When Sweyn died in 1014, Edmund was in position to help his father return and reclaim the throne. But Æthelred proved ineffective when Sweyn's son, Cnut, launched a new invasion in 1015. Edmund raised an army but, when Æthelred failed to appear to lead it, the army disbanded. Edmund raised another, which fared worse: Æthelred did turn up to lead it.

Finally, on 23 April 1016, Æthelred died and Edmund was crowned king. Determined to fight the Vikings, Edmund raised an army and fought Cnut's forces through summer and autumn, pushing the Danes back until he met them in the decisive battle of the war, at Assandun in Essex on 16 October. There, his father's chief councillor, Eadric Streona, betrayed Edmund and the English were decisively defeated. Edmund survived the battle but was forced to negotiate with Cnut, agreeing to split the country, with Edmund taking Wessex and Cnut Mercia. But a few weeks later, Edmund died.

With Edmund dead, the whole country fell under the rule of Cnut and one of his first acts was to execute Eadric Streona. A year after Edmund's death, Cnut visited his tomb and placed upon it a cloak, embroidered with peacocks, symbolising salvation. Unlike his forebear Alfred, Edmund was unable to save his nation, and for the next 26 years, it would be under Danish rule.



At the Battle of Hastings in 1066, Harold Godwinson was killed by an arrow to the eye by William the Bastard's troops, as depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry



THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF AN ANGLO-SAXON

In a society ruled by class and status, Anglo-Saxon life was hard but filled with surprising opportunities

Written by **Frances White**

The Anglo-Saxon period was one of incredible political and social upheaval, lasting from the arrival of Germanic tribes in the 5th century to the Norman Conquest of 1066. Although the Anglo-Saxons were mainly a warrior race - having fought off many foes to establish their base in England - they still were required to develop a functioning society for normal people to live in. So while boundaries shifted and kingdoms warred, normal life continued and developed around the battles.

Religion

When the Anglo-Saxons first arrived, they brought with them their thoroughly pagan beliefs. There was not one god but several, and people would pray to particular gods and goddesses to achieve particular things. For example, one goddess would grant you a bountiful harvest, while another victory in battle. Nature especially was held in reverence, with natural springs, wells, rocks and even trees believed to hold great power. The common people would wear charms, which they believed would bless them with a particular gods' power and protect them from evil spirits.

However, these traditions changed with the arrival of Christianity. By the end of the 6th century the religion had begun to spread rapidly, with many leaders converting and their people following suit. This had a huge impact on Anglo-Saxon life as monasteries were built and became centres of learning and literacy as the only schools in Anglo-Saxon England, and many children would go there to train as monks or nuns. The spread of Christianity was a major factor in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms finally uniting into one, by creating a common, unified culture.

Although Christianity soon became the most popular faith, many pagan beliefs were incorporated. We can still see these roots of these beliefs today, such as in the days of the week, inspired by the names of the pagan gods Tiw for Tuesday, Woden for Wednesday, Thunor for Thursday and Frige for Friday.

Social structure

Life for Anglo-Saxons was very different depending on which social class they fell into. The two most significant groups were slaves and the free, but within each group there were many different roles and hierarchy. The freeman group usually consisted of the king, the thegn (or nobleman) and the ceorl (or ordinary freeman). A person could move up and down these ranks, so in Anglo-Saxon society it was possible to become a self-made man. For example, ceorl merchants who travelled overseas repeatedly could rise to the rank of thegn. However, the main division between the thegns and ceorls was the amount of land owned. Thegns typically had to own at least five hides of land, but it was entirely possible for a ceorl who didn't own land to actually be richer than a thegn. You could also plummet down the social ladder. Even kings weren't safe, as a king who didn't provide land, slaves and plunder for his people would not last long.

At the very bottom of the ladder were the slaves, often referred to as thralls, and slavery was a huge enterprise, so it was rampant. Many thralls were simply born into it, or became one due to their land being conquered (hence the need for a strong king). If freemen were unable to pay a fine, they could also become slaves. It wasn't uncommon for starving families to sell their own children to slavery, in order to ensure the child was fed. However, like the social mobility of the free classes, slavery wasn't always permanent. An owner had the power to free their slaves, or relatives could pay for a slave to be returned. Those who became slaves due to debt could be freed when they had worked the value of their debt off.

It may come as a surprise that Anglo-Saxon women actually enjoyed a considerable degree

> "It wasn't uncommon for starving families to sell their own children to slavery, in order to ensure the child was fed"

of freedom. They could become abbesses of monasteries and there are many women recorded as major land-holders in the Domesday Book. Even ordinary women enjoyed relative independence; they were able to represent themselves in legal transactions and could own their own property, even when married. Sexual offences against women were penalised heavily and widows were given inheritance rights and custody of their children. The system of primogeniture, where the first-born male would earn inheritance rights, did not arrive in England until the Norman Conquest, so young girls were regarded with equal status to their brothers. Children, however, were expected to grow up fast, as ten years was considered old enough to take ownership of inherited property and to be held responsible for a crime.

Farming

It would be difficult to live in Anglo-Saxon England and not have your life involve farming in some capacity. In the earlier centuries these farms were owned outright by ceorls who would work together, all paying towards a team of oxen to plough the fields in long narrow strips, shared out between them so each person would have an equal share of fertile land. However, as time went on this land became the property of wealthy nobles, who would then employ ceorls to work on the land. These estates developed as large commercial enterprises with watermills to grind grain. The common crops sown were wheat, barley and rye, while peas, cabbages, parsnips, carrots and celery was also grown. Herds of goats, cattle, sheep and pigs were kept, but it was often the case that these had to be slaughtered during the winter due to lack of food.

A large majority of occupations were linked with this booming agricultural society. Male slaves were often used as farm labourers, but there were other roles on the farm such as cowherd, beekeeper, shepherd, granary keeper and even cheese makers (which appeared to be a female-only role.) Women were also employed to grind corn, and as weavers, seamstresses and dairymaids.

There were other professions not so strictly tied to the farms, such as bakers, carpenters, cobblers, fishermen, huntsmen, blacksmiths, potters, leather-workers and more. The existence of surviving artwork, sculpture and metal work is a testament to the talent of many Anglo-Saxon artisans, perhaps the most famous example being the Bayeux Tapestry, an elaborate piece embroidered by skilled Anglo-Saxon women.

Food and drink

Because fresh water was dangerously polluted, beer and mead were drunk daily in its place. This daily mead would be weak and sweetened with honey because sugar was not available. Honey was so important that bees were kept in every village. Although the Anglo-Saxons were fond of meat and fish, especially during their famous feasts, it was a luxury afforded frequently only to the very rich. Those who did eat meat would enjoy pork, beef, goat, deer and mutton. Horses were not eaten, and were kept only for farm labour and transportation.

The ordinary members of society essentially ate a vegetarian diet. Although wild animals were common, only those who owned the land were permitted to kill them. Peas, beans, lentils, carrots, parsnips, cabbages and onions were often eaten, along with some fruit such as apples and blackberries. Eggs were also consumed, not only from chickens but also ducks, geese and other wild birds. More 'exotic' food like potatoes, tomatoes and bananas had not yet made it to England.

Many villages were tiny, having only 100 inhabitants

Housing

Housing for Anglo-Saxons was basic. For the common man, houses were wooden huts with thatched roofs, and usually comprised of only one room. Those who had animals would often share their hut with them, divided by a screen. This had the advantage of warming the hut in the cold winters. Only rich people were able to afford candles, so the poor used rushes dipped in animal fat for light. Toilets were very basic – pits dug into the ground with a piece of wood with a hole in it for a seat.

Even the houses of the rich were quite basic – they were basically a larger version of the wooden huts used by the poor. However, often their houses were decorated with tapestries, paintings and furniture, which was usually simple and heavy.

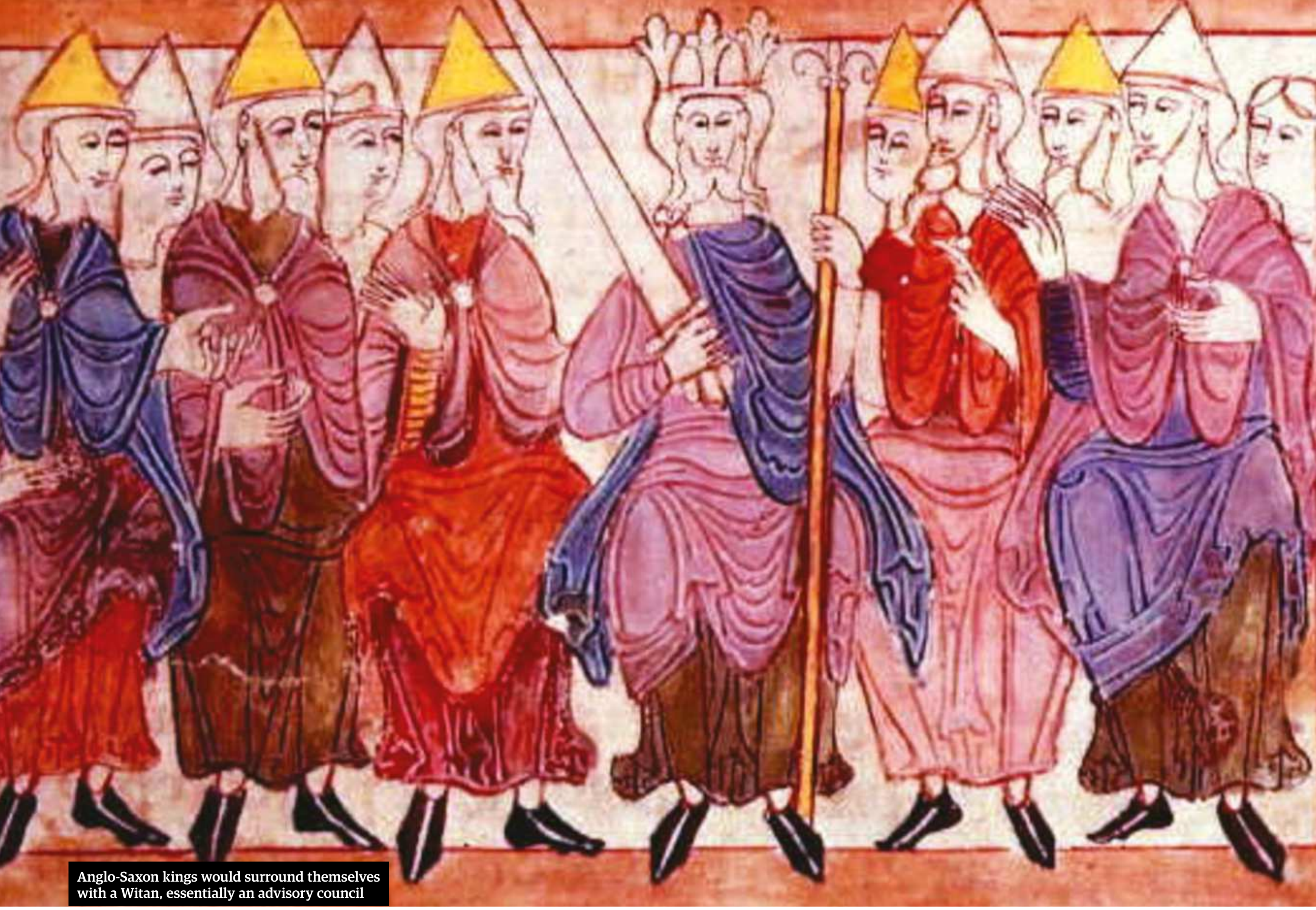
Clothing

Anglo-Saxon clothing was largely practical, especially for the common freemen. Most outfits were made out of simple linens and wools, with men wearing robes or tunics with breeches and soft shoes, while women would wear feet-length robes or dresses. Brooches were used by the rich and poor to keep their cloaks and mantles in place.

There were a few distinctions to mark rich from poor. For example, men of high rank wore longer tunics and their outfits would stand out due to their vibrant colours and detailed borders. It was the fashion for Anglo-Saxon men to have long hair and beards, and short hair was reserved for the lowest rungs of society. Women, especially after the introduction of Christianity, would cover their hair with a 'headrail'. This seems to have been strictly enforced, with women covering their hair even at home and in bed.

Leisure

There wasn't a lot of time between work and war for Anglo-Saxons to relax, but we do have some evidence of their pastimes. Falconry and hawking were popular activities for the upper classes, as well as playing music and feasting, which were also enjoyed by the lower classes. Poetry was often performed to music, along with dancing and theatre. During feasts the harp was popular, as was juggling, not only balls, but also knives.



Anglo-Saxon kings would surround themselves with a Witan, essentially an advisory council

Competitive sports were enjoyed by all including dog and horse racing, as well as dice and board games, such as chess in the 11th century. Solving complex riddles was a widespread leisure activity. Many talented men worked as minstrels or gleemen, employed to entertain their lords at feasts.

A changing society

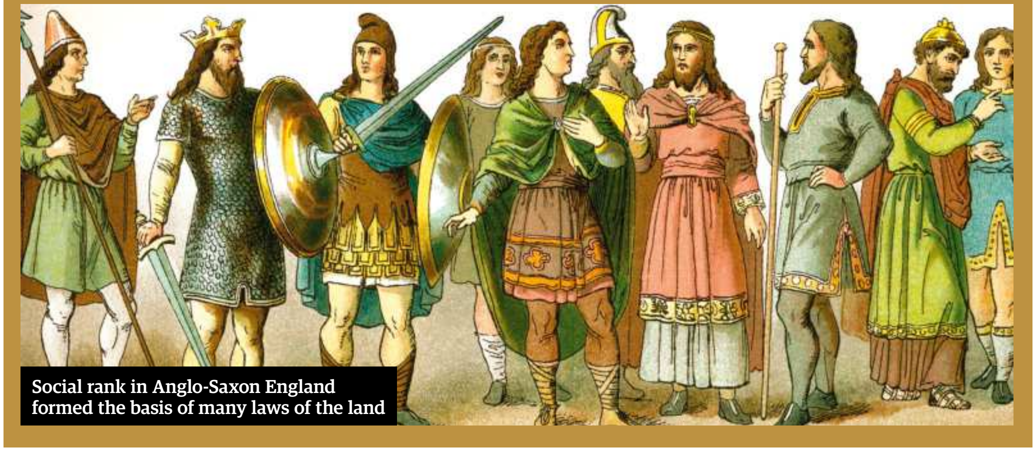
The conversion of Christianity ushered in a big change for the Anglo-Saxons with the introduction of Latin literacy and, of course, the monasteries. These monasteries, however, were a target for Viking invaders, and the 8th century was plagued by attacks. King Alfred defended against this by forming a treaty with the enemy and also uniting the Anglo-Saxons to a single nation, which changed the lives of ordinary people for good. Alfred's love of learning and writing spread throughout his united England, and he introduced educational reform focused on producing manuscripts in English, rather than Latin. Alfred's work set in motion a huge growth in learning, laws and charters, laying the foundation for England's future development. By the 11th century, ten per cent of people were living in newly created towns, helped by a flourishing trade network. Wooden ships sailed to and from ports exporting wool and slaves. England was transforming from a rural community to a civilised state ruled by a single king, preparing to play a major role on the world stage.

The man price

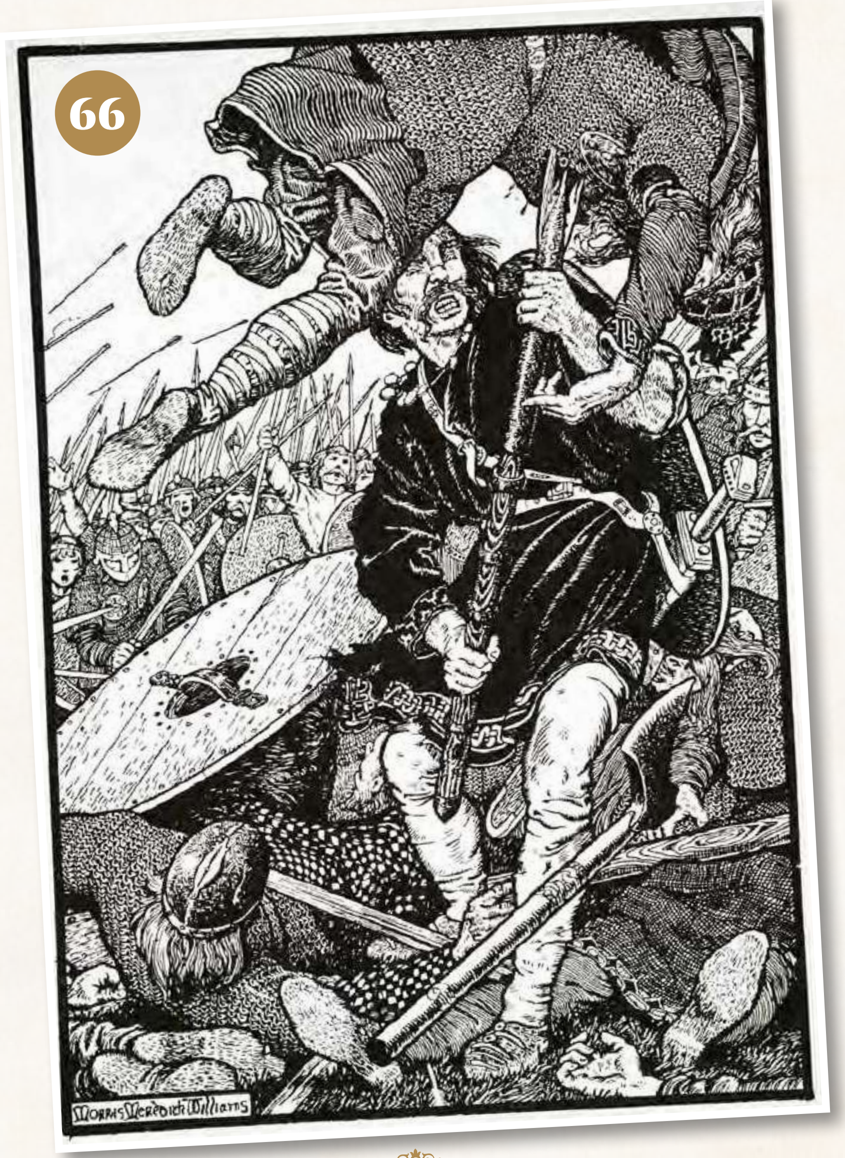
Wronged Anglo-Saxons faced a choice - money or blood

Anglo-Saxon legislation was prolific, with kings creating new laws throughout their reign. Many of these were concerned with injury and death. There was a kind of compensation placed on injuries inflicted on another man. For example, if you cut off an ear in 7th century Kent you had to pay the victim 12 shillings, a shoulder was 30 shillings, an eye the costly price of 50 shillings, and a finger was worth more than a toe.

However, if a man killed another, he was required to play the wergild, or the 'man price'. This sum would vary depending on the victim's social rank, so killing a thegn would enact a higher price than killing a ceorl and so on. This man price was brought in to try and lessen the number of revenge killings. Known as the system of blood feud, the relatives of a murder victim were expected to avenge their murdered loved one by killing the murderer. This could lead to long, extensive, bloody feuds between families. The wergild was extended to include other crimes, such as being injured or robbed in an effort to maintain a sense of law and order.



Social rank in Anglo-Saxon England formed the basis of many laws of the land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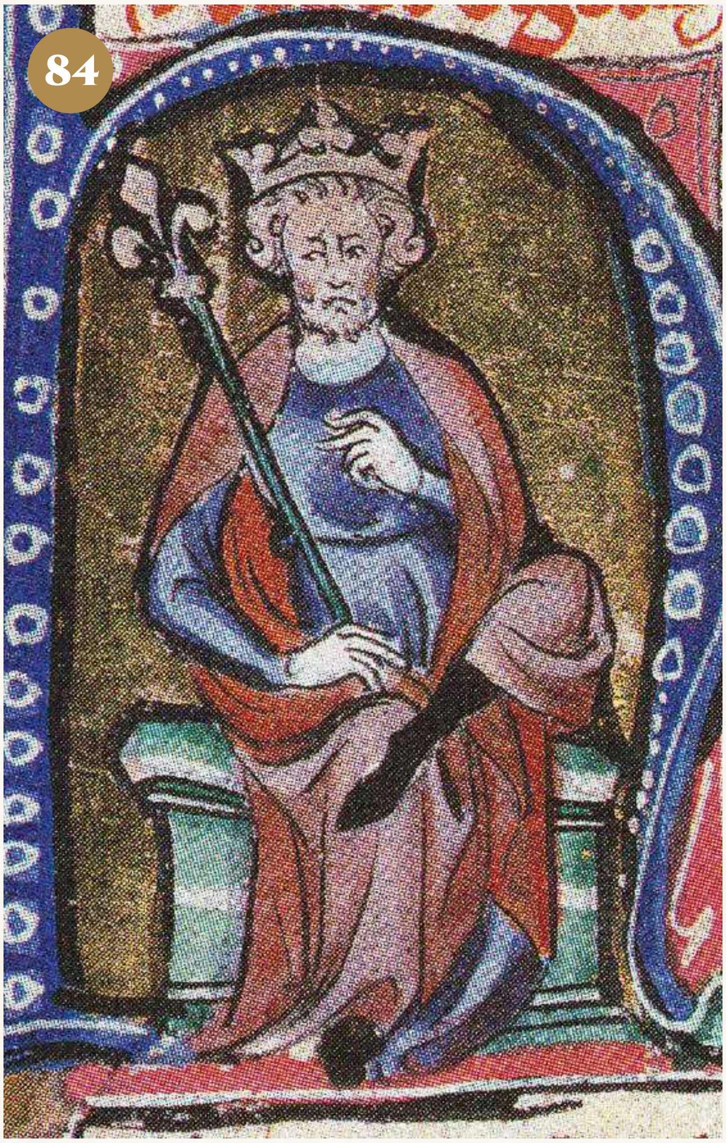

A UNITED ENGLAND

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Find out how one man managed to unite England

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Just when England thought it had seen the last of the Vikings, they came back for more

76 Emperor of the North
It's time to meet Cnut, the formidable ruler of the North Sea Empire

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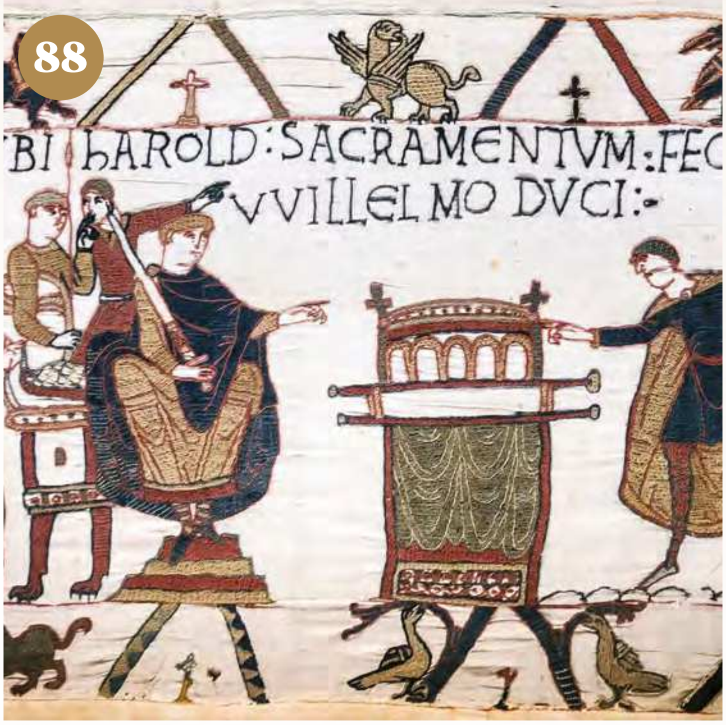
The king who brought stability also led England to the war that would change it forever

88 The Last Anglo-Saxon King
Explore the reign of Harold Godwinson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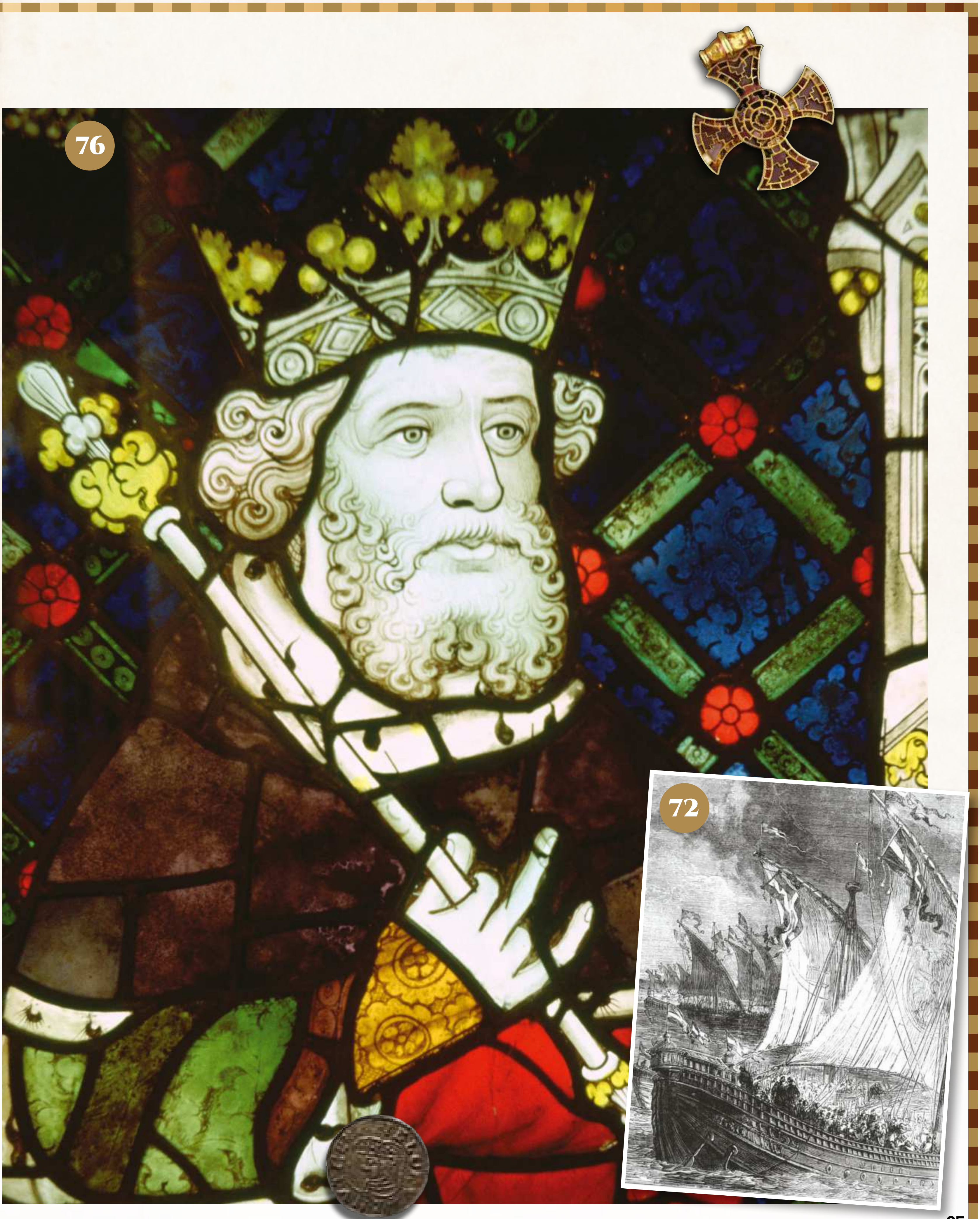

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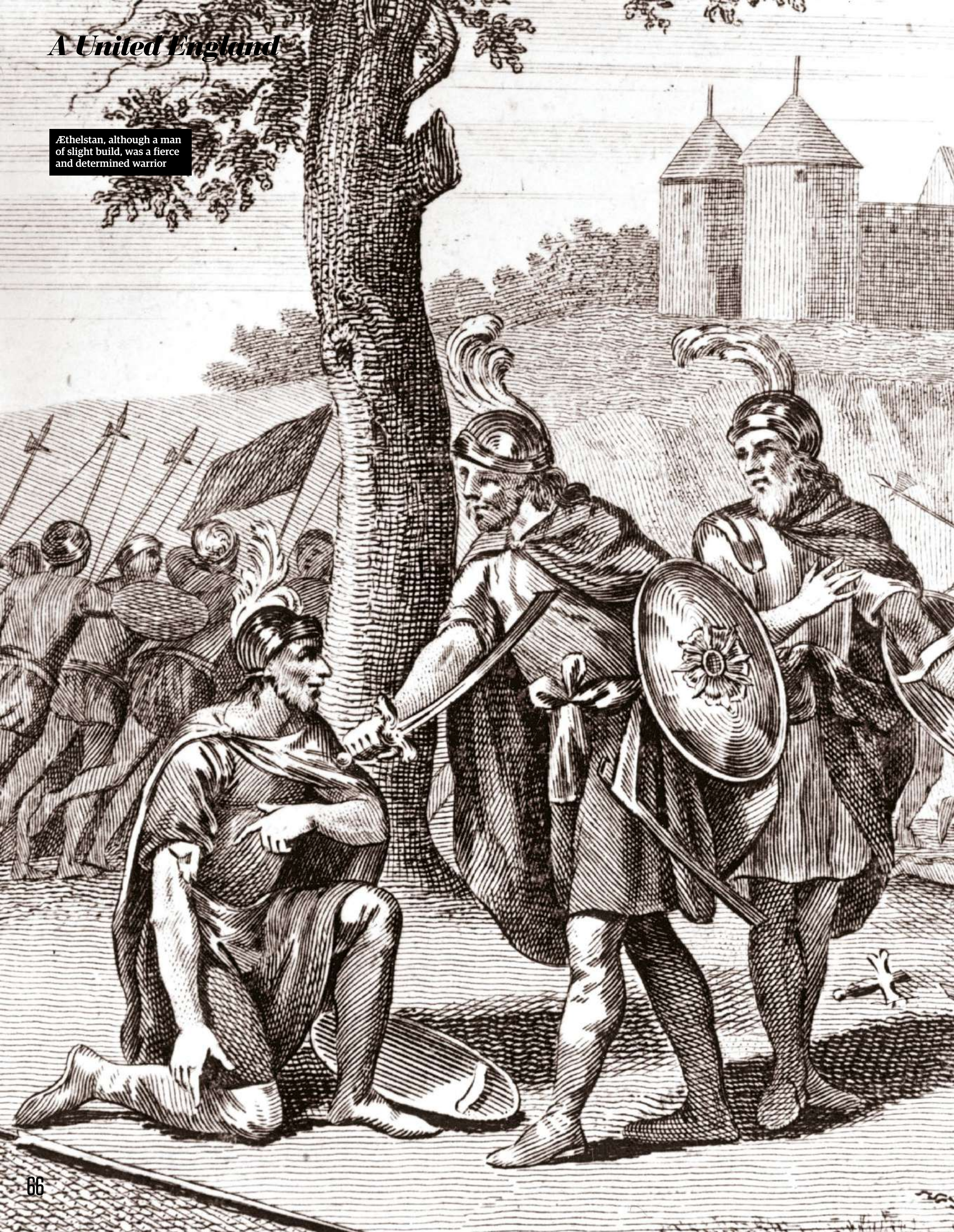


Æthelstan, although a man of slight build, was a fierce and determined warrior

ÆTHELSTAN THE GLORIOUS

Perhaps no king in English is history is more important and less remembered

Written by **Edoardo Albert**

It had been the great family enterprise, started by Alfred, continued by Edward and Æthelflæd, Alfred's son and daughter, and brought to completion by Alfred's grandson, Æthelstan. These three generations had made it their lives' work first to save their land from the depredations of the pagan raiders who had laid waste to kingdoms, then to wrest back control of the country from the pagans, and finally to make the many realms of Britain into one country.

These tasks, through the long labours of his grandfather, his father and aunt, and Æthelstan's own toil, had finally been accomplished. Æthelstan was now "by grace of God king of the English and equally guardian of the whole country of Britain". But when, in 937, news reached Æthelstan that the kings of Scotland, Dublin and Strathclyde had united against him and were bringing fire and ruin down upon his realm, it seemed that all his family had worked towards for the previous 70 years was on the verge of being undone. Even Æthelstan, the most decisive of kings, became all but helpless with indecision, dithering as to whether he dared face such a host of enemies. But he was the grandson of Alfred, son of Edward and nephew of Æthelflæd. None of them would have given up, even when faced with such odds. So Æthelstan regathered himself, summoned the men of Wessex and Mercia, and marched north for the great battle of his time.

That battle took place at Brunanburh. For a century and more, people talking of it simply had to say 'the great battle' and everyone would have known of what they spoke. After it was over, five kings and seven earls lay dead on the field of blood. Æthelstan and his weary men held the field, as Olaf Guthfrithson, the Viking king of Dublin, fled in a boat with his few remaining men back to Ireland, and King Constantine II of Scotland spurred his horse north, leaving his dead son behind.

Brunanburh was perhaps the most significant battle along the long road to making of England a country. Now, in the 21st century, after centuries united, we find it difficult to imagine just how remarkable this was. But England is the oldest unified country in Europe, its roots so deep we barely see them. It was Alfred, Edward, Æthelflæd and Æthelstan who planted the tree and rooted it, and then Æthelstan who, at the Battle of Brunanburh, defended it when the axe was poised to bring it down before it had chance to make those roots firm. Those roots have become so strong that few even remember who planted them and even the location of the 'great battle' has been forgotten.

As the victorious Æthelstan leaned on his sword, looking over the carnage, he must have felt his age. He was 43, a young man no longer, and his life had been one of toil. Giving thanks to God for victory, his memory turned also to his grandfather, and he remembered…

He had been a boy, not yet ten. Alfred, grandfather, king, stood in front of him, as tall as a tree, while all around the great men of the king's court watched in silence, his own father among them. Then Alfred had fixed round his waist a sword belt and placed over his thin shoulders a purple cloak. Alfred, king, looked round the assembly of the great men of his realm, marking that all well understood the significance of what he had done. For he had marked his grandson, Æthelstan, for kingship, putting his seal upon him. This was at a time when there were no fixed rules of royal inheritance. Æthelstan was first-born son of Edward, Alfred's eldest child, but who would be king was a matter for the witan, the assembly of the magnates of the realm, to decide. Blood mattered and Alfred's choice counted, but when it came time to make a new king, that king would have to command the support of the men who now watched in silence.

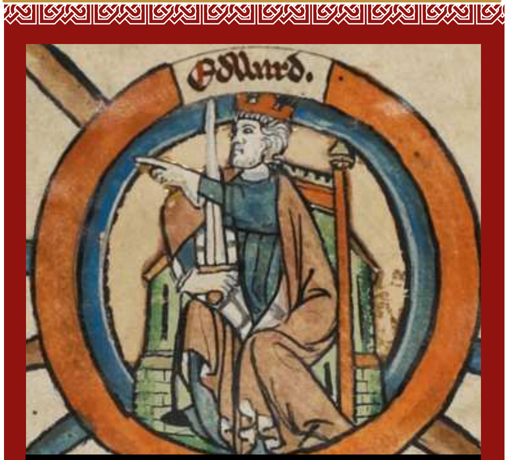
Among the most silent of the watching men was Æthelstan's own father. Edward had been taught many of the skills of kingship by Alfred, he had been his chief general during the Viking assault that took place in the final decade of Alfred's rule, but there was one area of rule in which he followed his own counsel. The women who would be his queens.

Æthelstan remembered the desperate struggle his father fought to retain the crown after Alfred's death, when Edward's cousin, Æthelwold, rebelled against him, even going so far as to raise a Viking army in his efforts to claim the throne. Æthelwold had failed, his claim and his life sucked down into the clutching mud of the Fens where Edward had made war on his cousin and his ally, the Viking king of the Danelaw. Edward had seen off one challenge, but to cement his rule he needed to bind the warring halves of the royal family together. He did this by putting aside Æthelstan's mother and taking a new wife, Æthelwold's niece, Ælflæd, who promptly produced a new son for her new husband.

Acting with cold logic but at least a grain of compassion, Edward put his eldest son from him and gave him into the keeping of his sister, Alfred's wise and determined daughter, Æthelflæd, the Lady of the Mercians. Alfred had taken half the ancient and historic kingdom of Mercia under his rule on signing the treaty with Guthrum that divided the country into the Danelaw and Anglo-Saxon territory, and installed an alderman, Æthelred, to govern it, marrying his clever daughter to Æthelred. When Æthelred fell victim to a long and debilitating illness, it was Æthelflæd who took control, aligning Mercian strategy with that of her brother: first the securing of their realms and then the reconquest of the Danelaw.

Teaching her nephew as she went, the Lady of the Mercians advanced inexorably into what had been Viking-held territory, turning the defensive strategy of burhs, fortified towns, into an offensive tactic by fortifying towns as she captured them.

> "Uniquely among early Medieval kings, Æthelstan never married"



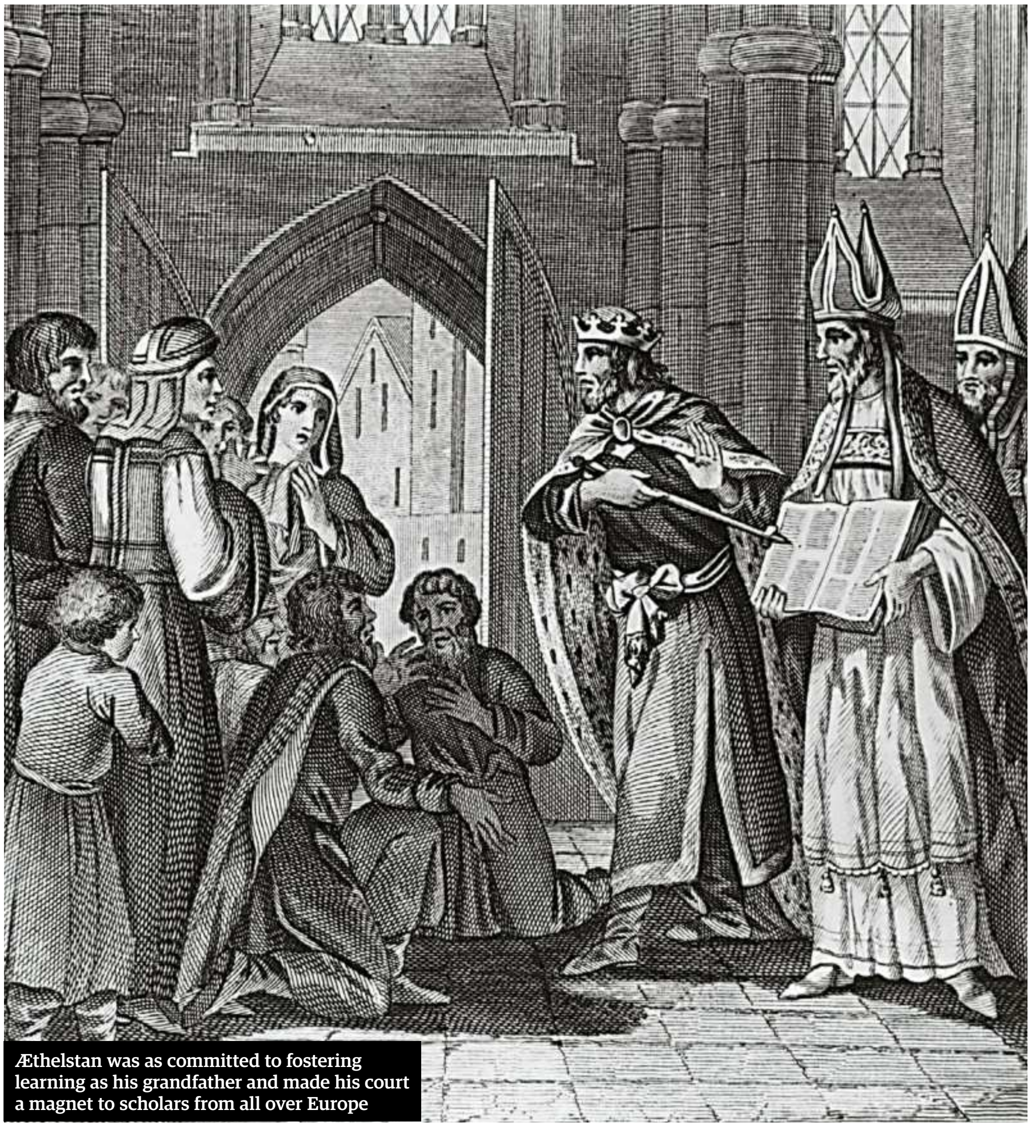
Edward the Elder, whose achievements deserve far greater recognition than they have received

Edward the Elder

Alfred's all-but-forgotten son and heir

Edward was old enough to remember the night when his father had had to flee for his life, taking his family to the marshy refuge of Athelney. He had had to wait, a child, for word as to whether his father had prevailed at the Battle of Edington or whether he would have to run again. He had been raised to fight the Viking invaders, taking his place as his father's chief lieutenant when still a teenager, and proving worthy of that trust. But such an upbringing had inculcated a savage certainty of purpose. Through no fault or oversight of his own would Edward give advantage to those pagans who would ravage his realm.

To that end, he approached his marriages as the business of a king, making and breaking queens – three of them in the end – to serve his political purposes. But there was one woman Edward did not put aside, for she had his full confidence as the other hand of the strategy he had inherited from his father: Æthelflæd, Edward's sister, reigned as Lord of Mercia, first securing her kingdom and then joining Edward in his assault on the Danelaw. Edward's trust, however, did not extend to Æthelflæd's daughter. When his sister died, some in Mercia would have installed Ælfwynn as a new 'Lady of the Mercians' but Edward removed her to a convent and brought the kingdom under his rule, the first king of a combined Wessex and Mercia.



Æthelstan was as committed to fostering learning as his grandfather and made his court a magnet to scholars from all over Europe

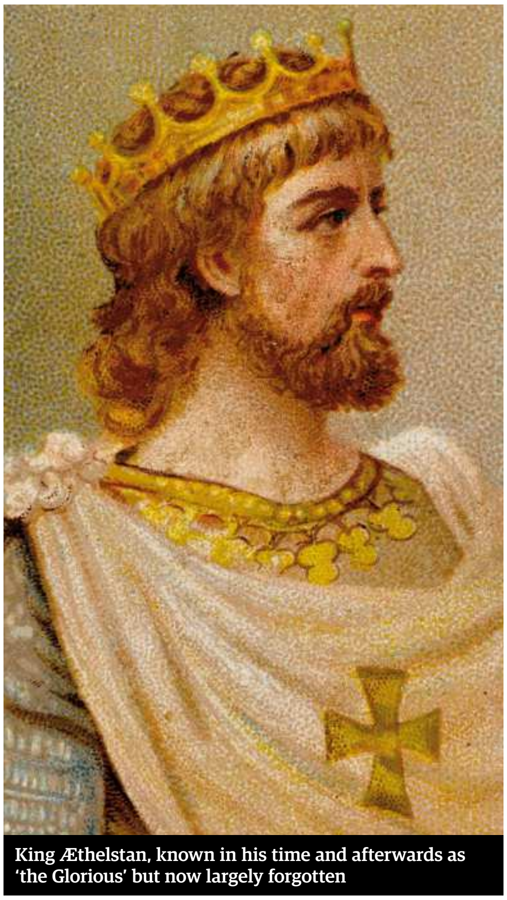
By 918, Edward and Æthelflæd had done what two decades earlier must have seemed impossible: they had reconquered the Danelaw. But Æthelflæd died on 12 June 918, and it was to Edward that "all the people who had settled in Mercia, both Danish and English, submitted".

However, Edward now had sons by Ælflæd who had been brought up in Wessex, whereas Æthelstan was almost unknown there. So when, on 17 July 924, Edward died, the question of who would be king after him, and king of where, was very much open. Æthelstan was acclaimed king by the witan of Mercia but there was a son, Ælfweard, in Wessex who expected a crown too. Perhaps the most likely outcome would have been for the two kingdoms, so recently united, to split apart again, each ruled by one of Edward's sons.

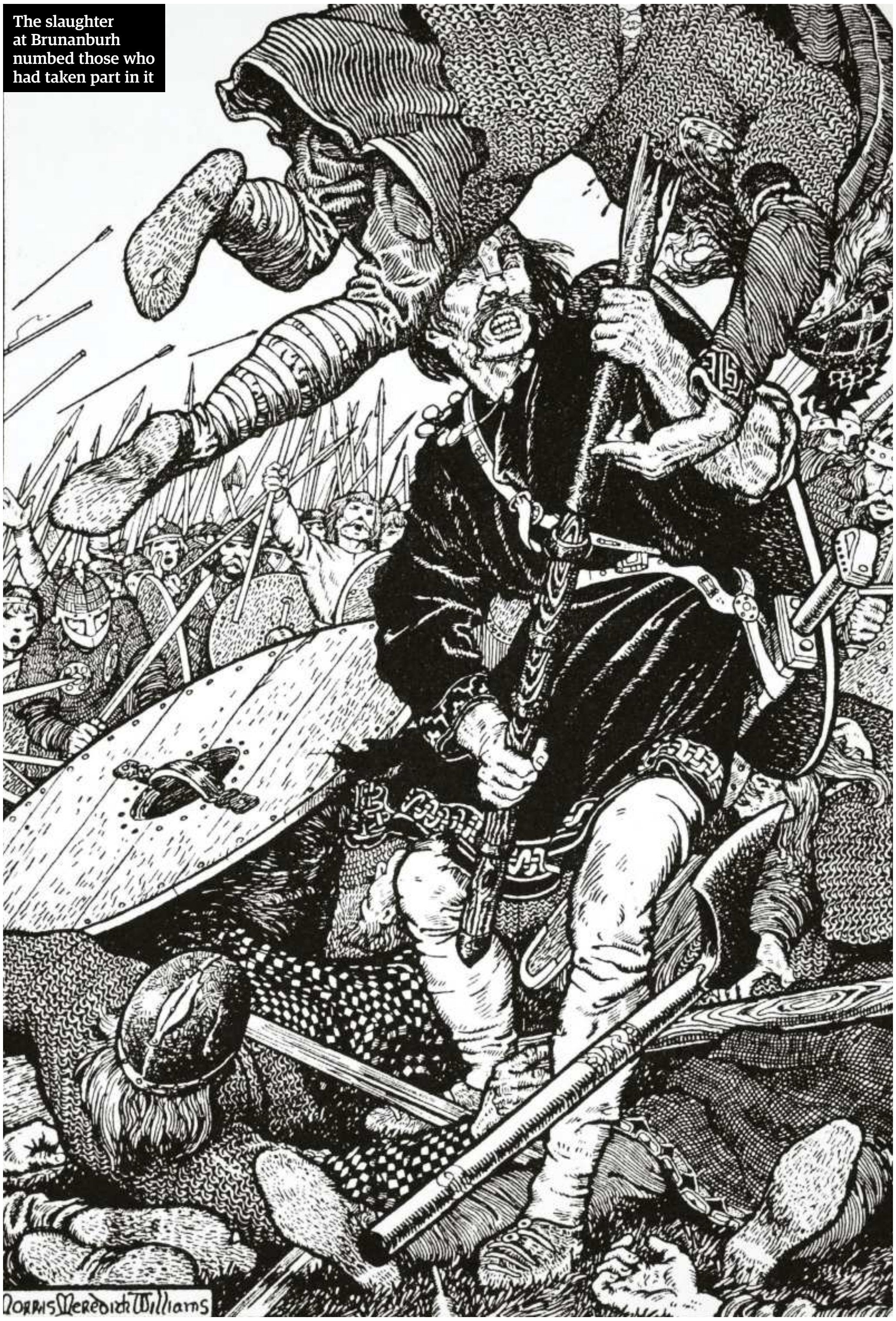
But then, barely two weeks later, Ælfweard died. So convenient a death could not but arouse suspicion, even though Æthelstan appears to have had no hand in it. So it was a year before Æthelstan was finally consecrated king, his coronation – for coronation it was – the first in these islands, taking place in Kingston, Surrey, on the River Thames, the traditional border between Wessex and Mercia. By placing his coronation there, Æthelstan was making a clear political point: he would be king of both kingdoms, cleaving neither to one nor the other, but ruling both justly and well, to the limit of his abilities.

Æthelstan's commitment to this service was total. Uniquely among early Medieval kings, Æthelstan never married and there are no records of bastard children born to him. His father, who had moved on to wife number three during his lifetime when his rule needed reinforcement from a different direction, had left no shortage of heirs. Seeing the realm come close to descending to civil war on his accession, Æthelstan vowed himself to chastity, ensuring that one of Edward's younger sons would eventually succeed him. He thus prevented a political schism between factions supporting him or his brothers, at the price of a lifetime of celibacy. In this hard road he had chosen, Æthelstan was supported by his fervent faith. He believed, to the core of his being, that God had given him the kingship for the purpose of the safeguarding and care of his people, and that failure would come at the price of his soul.

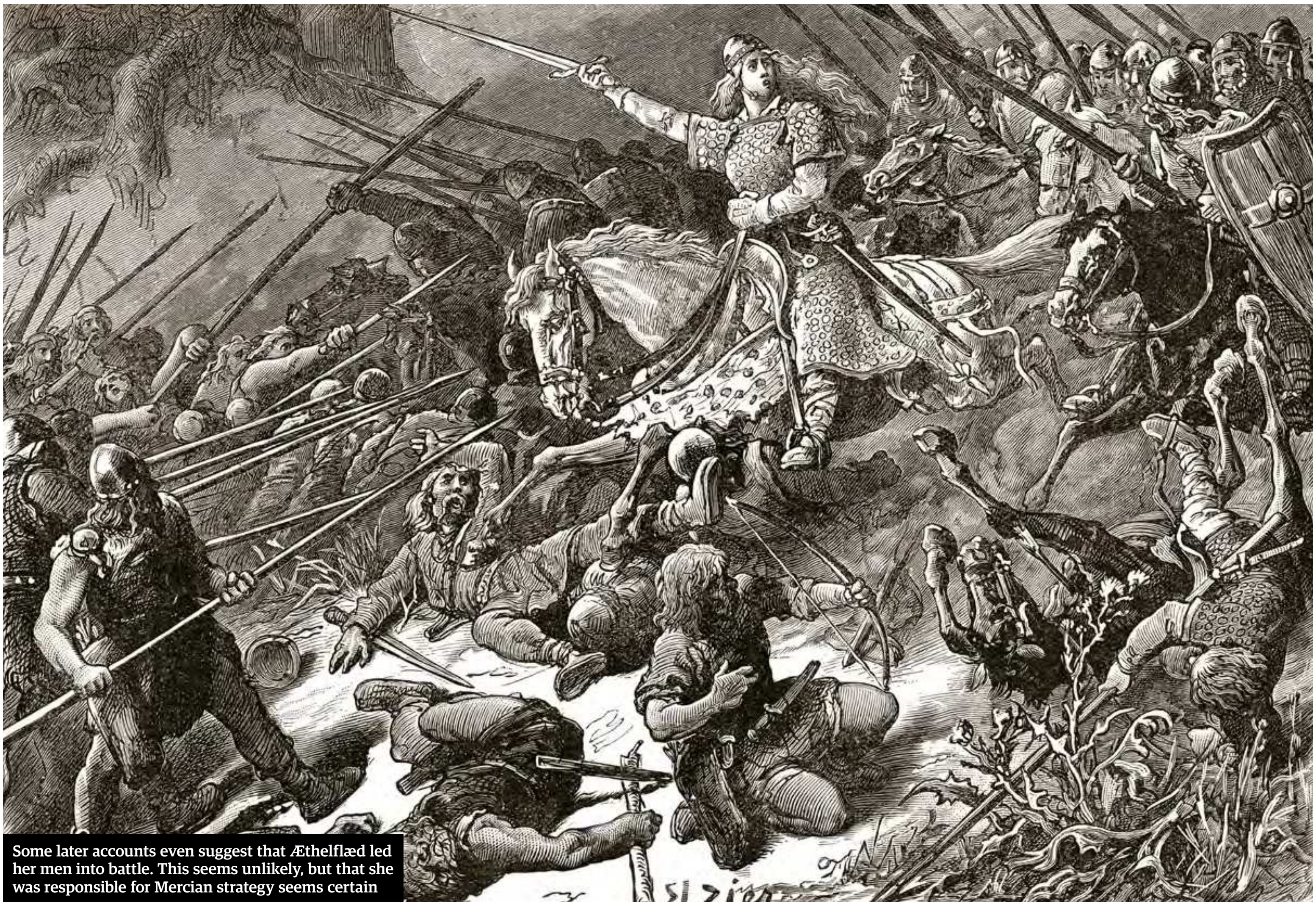
As king, Æthelstan enacted a stream of legislation to better protect his people, from outlawing the death penalty on those under the age of 15 to requiring his royal officials and the stewards of royal estates to care for the needy



King Æthelstan, known in his time and afterwards as 'the Glorious' but now largely forgotten



The slaughter at Brunanburh numbed those who had taken part in it



Some later accounts even suggest that Æthelflæd led her men into battle. This seems unlikely, but that she was responsible for Mercian strategy seems certain

"Æthelstan sought to ensure that none of them would think to make an alliance"

and provide food for the destitute: Æthelstan was determined that none of his people should die for lack of food, for God had given him the duty to feed them.

When the Viking king of York unexpectedly died, Æthelstan moved with the decisiveness he had learned from his father and aunt. While the Northmen sent to Dublin for a new king, Æthelstan rode north and took the city, bringing Northumbria under his control.

Such was Æthelstan's prestige and power now that he could summon all the kings of Britain to come to him and, on 12 July 927, they all swore peace with him and forswore any dealings with idolaters. Through this, Æthelstan sought to ensure that none of them would think to make alliance with the pagan Vikings against him.

Æthelstan was now a king of European stature and, with a bevy of marriageable half-sisters through his father's fecundity, he set about arranging political alliances with royal Houses across Europe.

But north of the border, Constantine, king of the Scots, brooded on the oath he had sworn to Æthelstan and kicked against its constraints. In 934, Æthelstan could brook Constantine's disloyalty no longer. Assembling the kings and princes who had sworn loyalty to him, he marched north, into Scotland, harrying and burning, with the object of teaching Constantine a lesson in the wisdom of oathkeeping. Seeing the army arrayed against him, Constantine retreated and offered no battle, settling back into apparent loyalty.

But he was waiting. Constantine had seen that, alone, he could not stand against Æthelstan. However, when messengers arrived from the king of the Dublin Vikings, Olaf Guthfrithson, asking the support of the king of the Scots, Constantine did not hesitate, despite his oath to have no dealings with pagans. There was another, too, who chafed at the sovereignty of Æthelstan: Owain, king of Strathclyde. The three kings came together – three kings to break the power of the one who claimed to rule them all.

They finally met on Brunanburh field. "Never yet in this island before this by what books tell us and our ancient sages, was a greater slaughter of a host made by the edge of the sword," the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* reported. The kingdom that had been so laboriously assembled by Alfred, Edward, Æthelflæd and Æthelstan would survive. But, exhausted, Æthelstan did not pursue the fleeing kings. He made his slow way back south, bearing the bodies of two of his cousins to their burials.

Æthelstan lived for two years after the battle, dying on 27 October 939, worn down by the demands of rule. He was succeeded by his half-brother, Edmund. In the aftermath of Æthelstan's death, Olaf Guthfrithson made another play for York, but his death in 941 gave Edmund the chance to take Northumbria back. Control of the north swung back to the Vikings on Edmund's death in 946, but it returned to his heirs soon afterwards and was never seriously contested again.

The north was won and England was a single country ruled by one king. The long work of Alfred and his descendants was done. As for Æthelstan, a chronicler in Ulster, recording his death, told well the regard with which he was regarded through Christendom for with his passing went "the pillar of the dignity of the western world".

A PORTRAIT OF A KING

This striking image from the Dark Ages depicts one of the greatest kings in English history

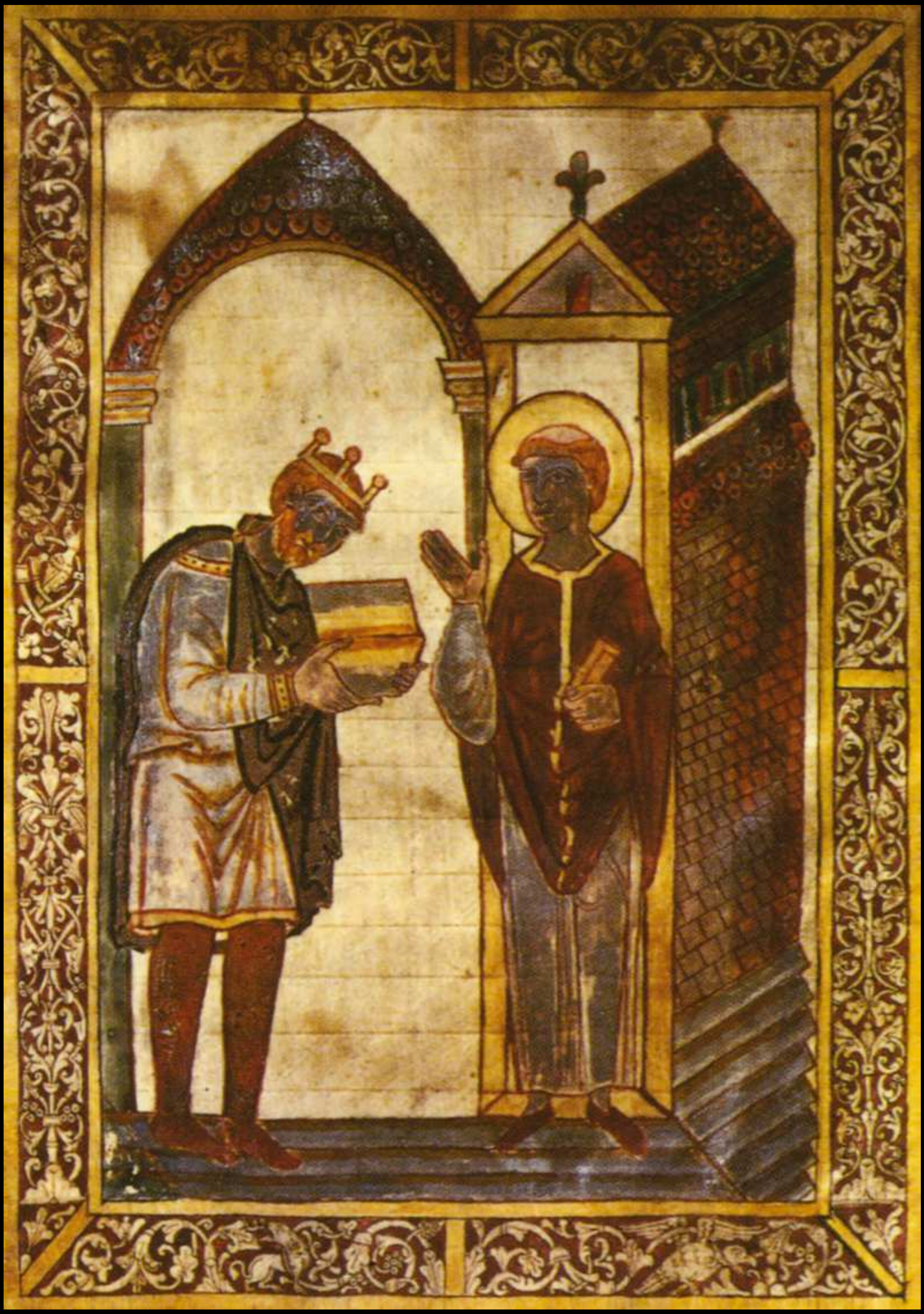
Alfred the Great is widely regarded as the founding father of a united England and it is true that many of his achievements are undeniable. Nevertheless, Alfred was not the first 'king of England' as he is sometimes assumed to be. He was only ruler of Wessex and, at best, only referred to himself as 'king of the Anglo-Saxons' once. The first true monarch of England was his equally talented - but far less known - grandson: Æthelstan.

Although known as a warrior king, Æthelstan was also more than that; he was noted for his piety. He founded religious houses, collected relics and had a keen interest in theological manuscripts. In fact, in 934, on his way north, Æthelstan stopped at Chester-le-Street to visit Saint Cuthbert. Admittedly, Cuthbert had been dead for around two and a half centuries, but his power as a saint and intercessor continued, made all the more potent for when the king arrived. The monks reverently opened the sarcophagus containing the saint's body to reveal it as incorrupt.

In token of his appreciation for the intercession of the saint, Æthelstan decided to commission a splendid Gospel Book and presented it to the monks at Chester-le-Street (they would later move Cuthbert to Durham, where his body still resides in the cathedral). On the back of the first folio is a picture of a king presenting a book to a saint.

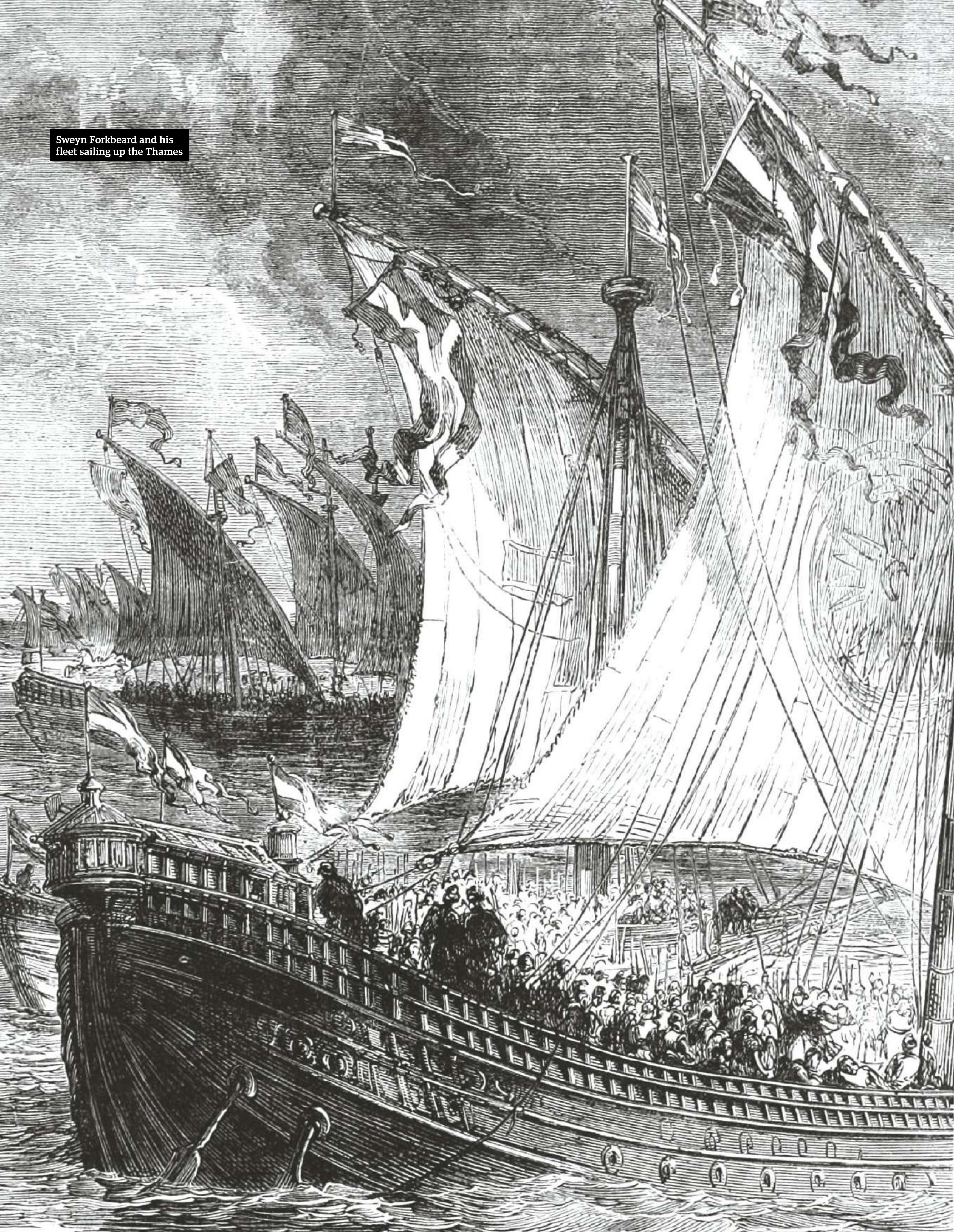
Although neither are named, they are clearly Æthelstan and Cuthbert: the king is crowned yet still he bows before the great sanctity of the saint. For his part, Cuthbert has his right hand raised in blessing to the humble king before him. By his gift, and his honour, Æthelstan won the blessing of the most renowned saint of Northumbria, a force in heaven and a blessing among his people on earth, and he left us his portrait, the first direct depiction of a king in our history.

The evidence has been confirmed by the existence of a similar image in a Breton manuscript written 50 years later with the inscription: "Æthelstan, the pious king of the English, gives this gospel book to Saint Cuthbert, the bishop." Consequently, this is the earliest surviving portrait of an English king and arguably a fitting tribute to the rich legacy of this forgotten king.



© Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

King Æthelstan presenting a book to Saint Cuthbert. The choice of the Northumbrian Cuthbert is significant as he was revered by the House of Wessex and was an early symbol of English reconciliation and identity



Sweyn Forkbeard and his fleet sailing up the Thames

THE VIKINGS RETURN

Sweyn Forkbeard and the conquest of Anglo-Saxon England

Written by **Wayne Bartlett**

As the 10th century marched on, it may have seemed that the Viking threat to England had gone away for good. With the gradual Anglo-Saxon reconquest of all the previously Viking-controlled areas of the country, it appeared as if the battle for England had at last ended. The reign of King Edgar 'the Peaceable' from 959 onwards seemed to many to be a Golden Age due to its absence of any serious Viking threat. Edgar regularly sent his fleet sailing around the shores of Britain as an unmistakable sign that his kingdom could no longer be attacked with impunity. Viking raiders heeded the message.

All this was, however, a dream that died with Edgar. Within a few short years of his demise the Viking menace reappeared, encouraged to do so by succession crises and the underlying disunity of Anglo-Saxon England. The raids gradually increased in intensity until in 991 a substantial armada of Viking ships attacked in the southeast of the country. They eventually faced off against a strong Anglo-Saxon army at Maldon in Essex, where they won a famous victory.

During this period, two men in particular assumed prominence. One of them was a Norwegian called Harald Tryggvason, the other a Dane by the name of Sweyn Forkbeard. While originally they would cooperate with each other, ultimately they became bitter rivals, coming to blows over the vexing question of who should be king of Norway, a position that kings of Denmark had long claimed with varying degrees of success.

The king of England during these troubled times was the infamous Æthelred II, known as 'The Unready'. His strategy was to buy the raiders off by means of the notorious 'Danegeld' payments, essentially a form of protection money. It was an approach of doubtful merit; all the payments did was encourage the Vikings to return later to receive another, larger payment in what became a vicious circle of ever-increasing amounts of tribute, handed over time and time again. Yet although in the long run it badly damaged the English economy, it was an approach that was not without its successes.

The most positive example of this was when Harald Tryggvason was persuaded to become a Christian (and a very enthusiastic if rather violent one at that) and return to Norway to attempt to seize the throne, which he duly did. This had the fortunate side effect of also encouraging Sweyn Forkbeard to leave England alone as he fought Harald over Norway. Eventually the victory went to Sweyn, who crushed Harald and his fleet at the battle of Svold off the coast of Norway in the year 999 or 1000 (there are conflicting dates given by the sagas and chronicles that refer to it).

Sweyn was the son of Harald Bluetooth, the first Christian king of Denmark. Sweyn, like Harald Tryggvason, was ruthlessly ambitious, a ruthlessness that saw him take on and depose his own father. He is associated with a band of semi-legendary warriors called the Jomsvikings, who allegedly raided widely, in the Baltic in particular. After becoming king of both Denmark and Norway, he desired to add England to his growing empire. He had formidable resources available to him to help him succeed. There was a pool of strong and vastly experienced warriors prepared to fight for him, particularly if the price was right.

Events in England in 1002 gave him the perfect excuse. During November of that year, the Anglo-Saxon king Æthelred launched a dawn raid against the Danish inhabitants of England, or some of them at least, in what became known as the St Brice's Day Massacre. He felt, perhaps with some reason, that some of the Scandinavian settlers formed what was essentially a Fifth Column inside his kingdom. It was a coordinated attack that, while it destroyed some of the Danes in England (though almost certainly not in the Danelaw, where there were simply too many people of Danish descent to wipe out), only succeeded in the long term in legitimising ever more fierce Viking attacks on the divided country.

Sweyn was at the head of these; perhaps, chroniclers suggest, because his sister Gunhild was one of the victims of the Massacre. Also among the dead was her husband, Sweyn's brother-in-

> "Sweyn is associated with a band of semi-legendary warriors called the Jomsvikings, who raided widely"

St Frideswide's Church, Oxford, the site of a Viking-era massacre

law, Pallig. Pallig had allegedly been instrumental in helping Viking raiders while at the same time accepting generous gifts from Æthelred and pretending to be his man.

Strong evidence of the Massacre has been found, including the hacked-about remains of men of Scandinavian descent, who were killed at about this time at the burned-out church of St Frideswide in Oxford. The victims were from the right period and were found during an archaeological dig there a few years ago. A charter that re-established the church after it was rebuilt soon after noted that this was following the actions that Æthelred had taken to "remove the cockles [weeds] from amongst the wheat" – a disturbing turn of phrase that shows just how much hatred the Danish settlers had created in some quarters of England.

Another stunning find in 2009 occurred near Weymouth in Dorset, when workmen constructing a new road came across the remains of over 50 men of Scandinavian descent who had been executed at around the end of the 10th century. All of them had been decapitated, some at least with their hands tied, and then thrown into a disused quarry without ceremony or care. The number found may suggest that this was the crew of a Viking ship that had been captured or run aground, but there is a possibility that they may have been victims of the Massacre too, as their remains are from the right general period.

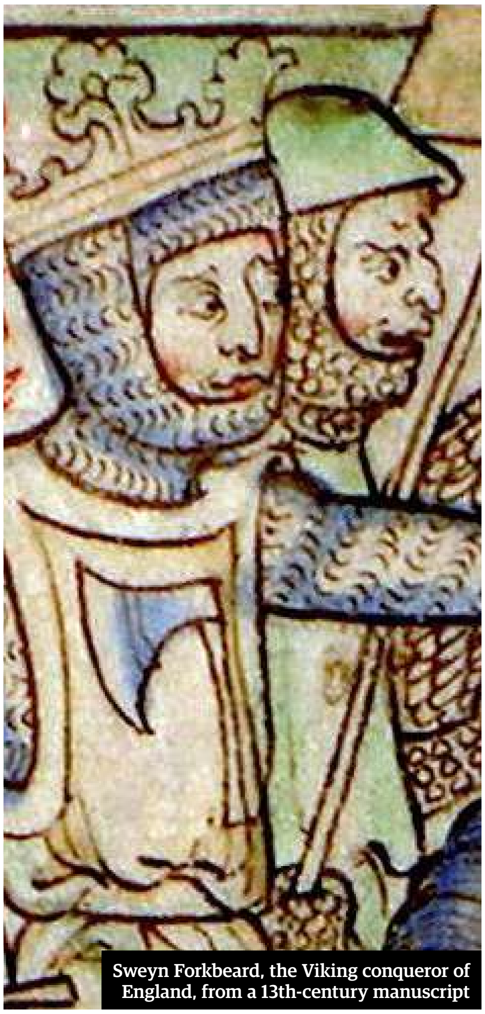
Each year the growing Viking army would return. Although many of the army were Danes, there were also Norwegians and Swedes known to have taken part. The price required to pay them off continued to increase, and England progressively weakened and was less able to resist, until at last Sweyn could see that the ultimate prize, the English crown, was within his grasp. There are signs of increasing strain on England; mints were moved from towns into old hill forts such as Cadbury in Somerset and Cissbury Ring in West Sussex, places that had been abandoned long ago but were now rapidly refortified in an attempt to increase levels of protection against the raiders. King Æthelred seemed increasingly incapable of fighting back against the invaders, who were able to out-manoeuvre him at every turn.

These were violent and desperate times for the people of England. An event of profound significance was the capture in 1011 of Ælfheah (also known as Alphege), the archbishop of Canterbury, who was seized by the Vikings when his city and church were captured and sacked. For the next seven months he was kept as a prisoner and taken to Greenwich, where he was held until a ransom should be paid for his release. When he proved obstinate, he was brought out in front of a drunken Viking mob and hacked to death, an event that later inspired his successor Thomas Becket when he was on the verge of his own martyrdom.

These shocking events demonstrated just how powerless Æthelred and his people were to resist for much longer. When Sweyn Forkbeard fell on England once more in 1013, it was clear that the end was close. He advanced across England in what was almost a procession. Only London showed persistent resistance, but the city became increasingly isolated. Seeing that his time was up, Æthelred vacated his throne and fled to Normandy in ignominy. This left the way clear for Sweyn to become king of England, but then fate intervened. Before he could officially be crowned, Sweyn suddenly died. There was no warning of ill health, and because of this,

> "These were violent and desperate times for the people of England"

Cissbury Ring, the site of an old hill fort that was called back into use during the Viking Age



Sweyn Forkbeard, the Viking conqueror of England, from a 13th-century manuscript

some of the English people thought that divine intervention was behind his demise. A story even developed that the ghost of King/Saint Edmund, killed by the Vikings a century and more ago, had appeared before Sweyn and run him through with a spear. Sweyn had allegedly mistreated the great abbey that had been set up to honour Edmund in East Anglia, and this was a form of supernatural payback.

An amazing reversal of fortune followed almost at once. Æthelred returned from exile in Normandy to reclaim his throne. His army fell on that of Sweyn's son and successor, the inexperienced Cnut, and utterly destroyed it. Cnut was forced to flee for his life and returned to Denmark, leaving Æthelred to celebrate a stunning victory, though not before the Danish prince had left behind him a group of unfortunate hostages, whom he ordered to be mutilated. The restored king did not have long to enjoy his unexpected triumph though; he was old and ill and would die soon after. A vicious war then took place between his son, Edmund 'Ironside', and Cnut, who returned with a large army soon after fleeing England. By the end of 1016, Cnut was triumphant and Edmund was dead. England was now firmly in the grasp of a Viking ruler, one that would be remembered as one of its great kings.

The Battle of Maldon

A spectacular reminder of a Viking triumph

When Vikings and Anglo-Saxons fought at Maldon in Essex in 991, they inspired one of the greatest treasures of Anglo-Saxon literature. A poem, named *The Battle of Maldon* after the skirmish, was written up to commemorate what was a bruising Viking victory, and a substantial element of the text has survived.

The poem, written in an epic style, commemorates the bravery and sacrifice of the Anglo-Saxons, which culminated in a suitably climactic event – namely the death of their leader, ealdorman Byrhtnoth. Yet the poem does not gloss over the fact that at the end, the ealdorman was deserted by some of his army, who fled the battlefield rather than die at the hands of their Viking opponents.

The Vikings had traversed a narrow causeway after requesting that Byrhtnoth should let them cross over, so that they could have a fair fight. The ealdorman, perhaps keen to bring them to battle rather than rash, agreed, and a brutal conflict followed, in which the Vikings emerged victorious.

Seeing that the end was near, the poem has Byrhtnoth issue a stirring rallying cry; "Our hearts must grow resolute, our courage more valiant, our spirits must be greater, though our strength grows less"; an early evocation of the Dunkirk spirit for which the descendants of the Anglo-Saxons later became so famous.

A modern statue of Byrhtnoth marks the site of his heroic death at Maldon

EMPEROR OF THE NORTH

1,000 years ago, a young Viking warrior became king of England. No one at the time can have expected how remarkable his reign would be

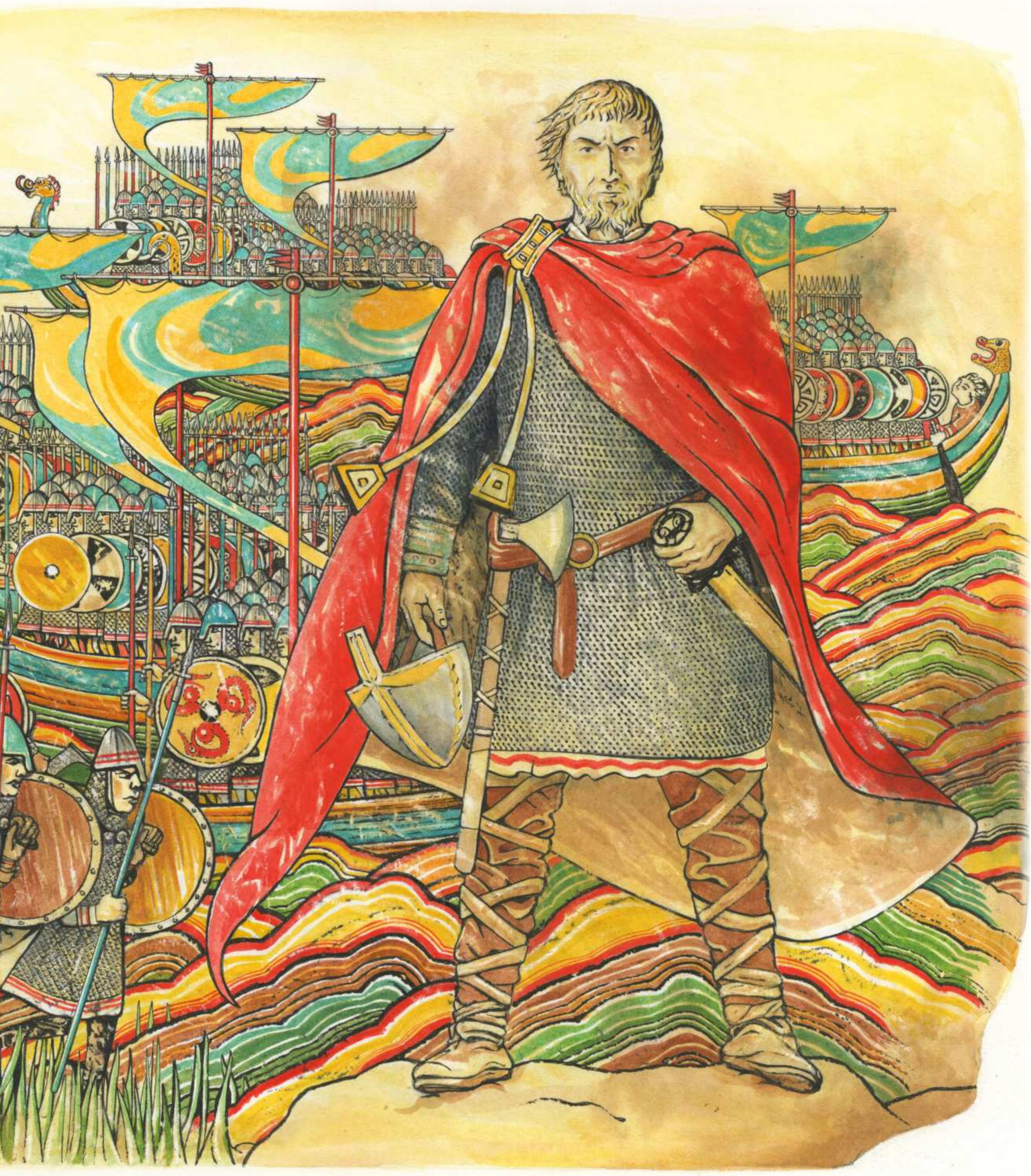
Written by **Wayne Bartlett**

Most famous now for his futile efforts to turn back the encroaching tide on the seashore, the life of Cnut was extraordinary. As well as being a strong, reliable supporter of the Church, he was also an archetypal Viking raider. Forming part of a dynamic marital alliance with his wife, Emma, he was also accused of the murder of his brother-in-law, Ulf. As well as ruling England and Denmark, he was also for a short time king of Norway. His government of what has been called an 'Empire of the North' was a unique achievement, setting Cnut apart as a remarkable man and an outstanding ruler.

Cnut's roots were in Denmark. His great-grandfather, Gorm the Old, was the founder-figure of the Jelling dynasty in Jutland. Gorm was a formidable pagan warrior, but his son, Harald Bluetooth, became an enthusiastic Christian ruler. Harald was involved in a bitter civil war with his own son, the renowned Sweyn Forkbeard, a conflict that ended with him fleeing the country and dying shortly afterwards in exile. Sweyn took over and won a reputation as a ruthless and ferocious Viking raider, frequently launching attacks on Britain, Ireland and elsewhere.

Cnut, the son of Sweyn Forkbeard, was probably born in around 995, though no one knows that for sure. The chronicles of the time are equally silent about the first 18 years of Cnut's life and it is not until 1013 that we find him first mentioned in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. But in that year he accompanied Sweyn on what was supposed to be the climactic campaign in the battle to conquer England. After several decades of raiding, increasing in scale all the time and often only ended by the payment of what later became known as 'Danegeld', Sweyn sensed that England was fatally wounded and, like a hungry predator, moved in for the kill.

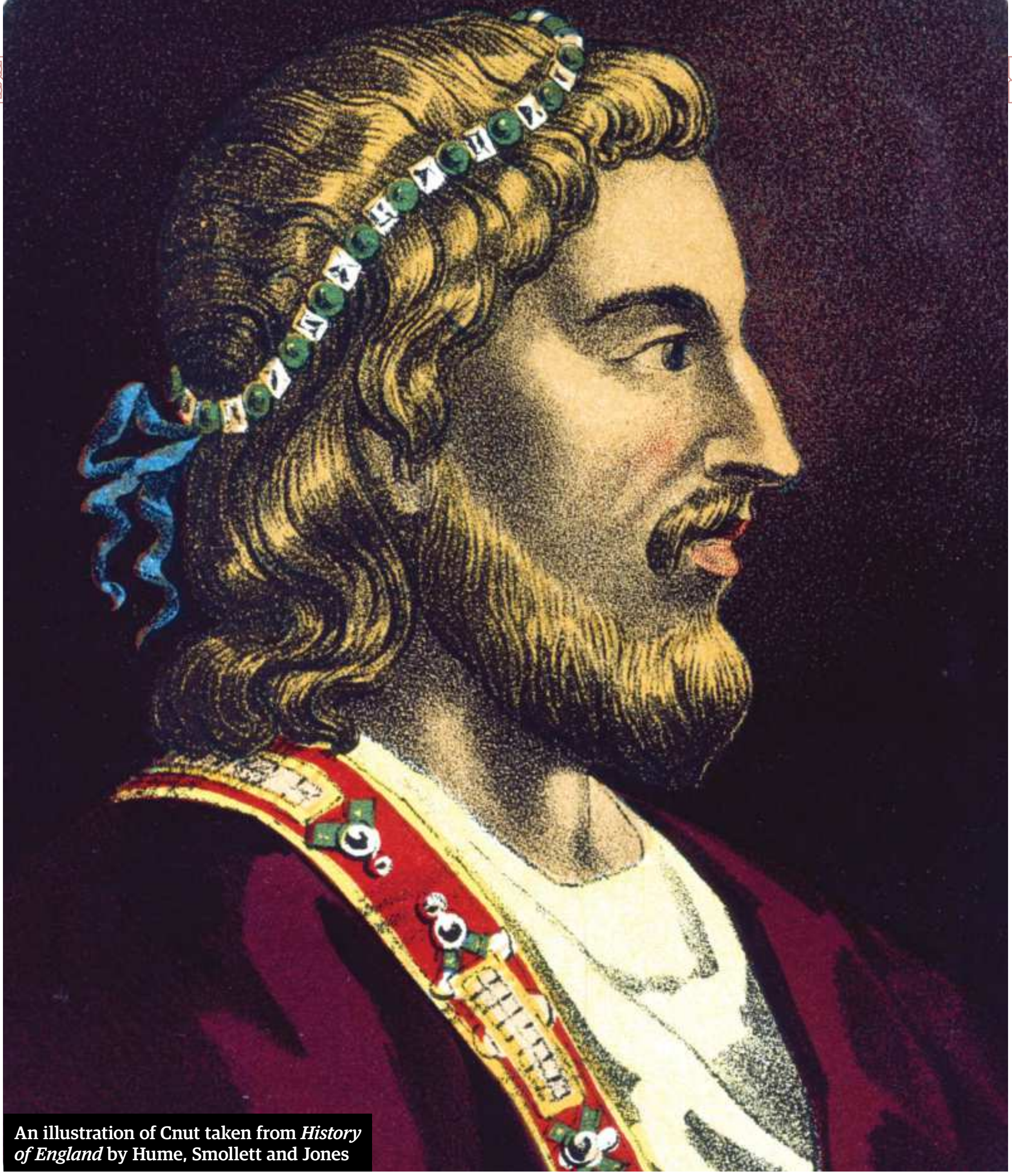
He found support for his ambitions from the region of the Danelaw (around the East Midlands of modern England), and Northumbria also soon



submitted to him. Moving into southern England, the defence against his forces quickly collapsed. The English king, Æthelred II ('the Unready') soon after fled the country with his wife Emma and their children, Edward and Alfred. England, it seemed, had fallen. King Æthelred would later be painted as something of a pantomime villain, incompetent and cowardly in equal measure. It was a very harsh assessment given the enormous challenges that he had faced, but it could not be doubted that his reign had apparently ended in spectacular failure.

But just then, as if by a miracle, Sweyn died before he had been made king. Cnut was not with him at the time, having stayed in the Danelaw while Sweyn had moved into southern England. Shortly after, Cnut was badly caught out by a surprise attack on his camp launched by English forces. Æthelred returned from exile and Cnut, barely escaping with his life, fled to Denmark. Before departing, he left behind him a group of hostages minus their ears and noses. This was Cnut the Viking in action.

England's respite, though, was short-lived. In 1015, Cnut was back with 200 ships sailing through the 'mouth of the Frome' into Dorset. This saw the beginning of a brutal war for the control of England between Cnut and Edmund Ironside, the son of the now-dying King Æthelred and his first wife. Both were very young warriors, in their early 20s, and the fighting that followed through several battles at Penselwood, Sherston and Otford was bloody and violent. Cnut also laid siege to London and it was a brutal contest that was fought out over a period of a year and more.


An illustration of Cnut taken from *History of England* by Hume, Smollett and Jones

"There was a real chance the new king would milk England for all it was worth"

The last decisive battle took place at Ashingdon (or Assandun), Essex, in October 1016. It ended in a crushing victory for Cnut. Edmund survived the battle and a deal was struck that left him with Wessex but Cnut with the rest of England. The deal did not survive for long because on 30 November 1016, Edmund very conveniently died, leaving Cnut as the undisputed king of all England.

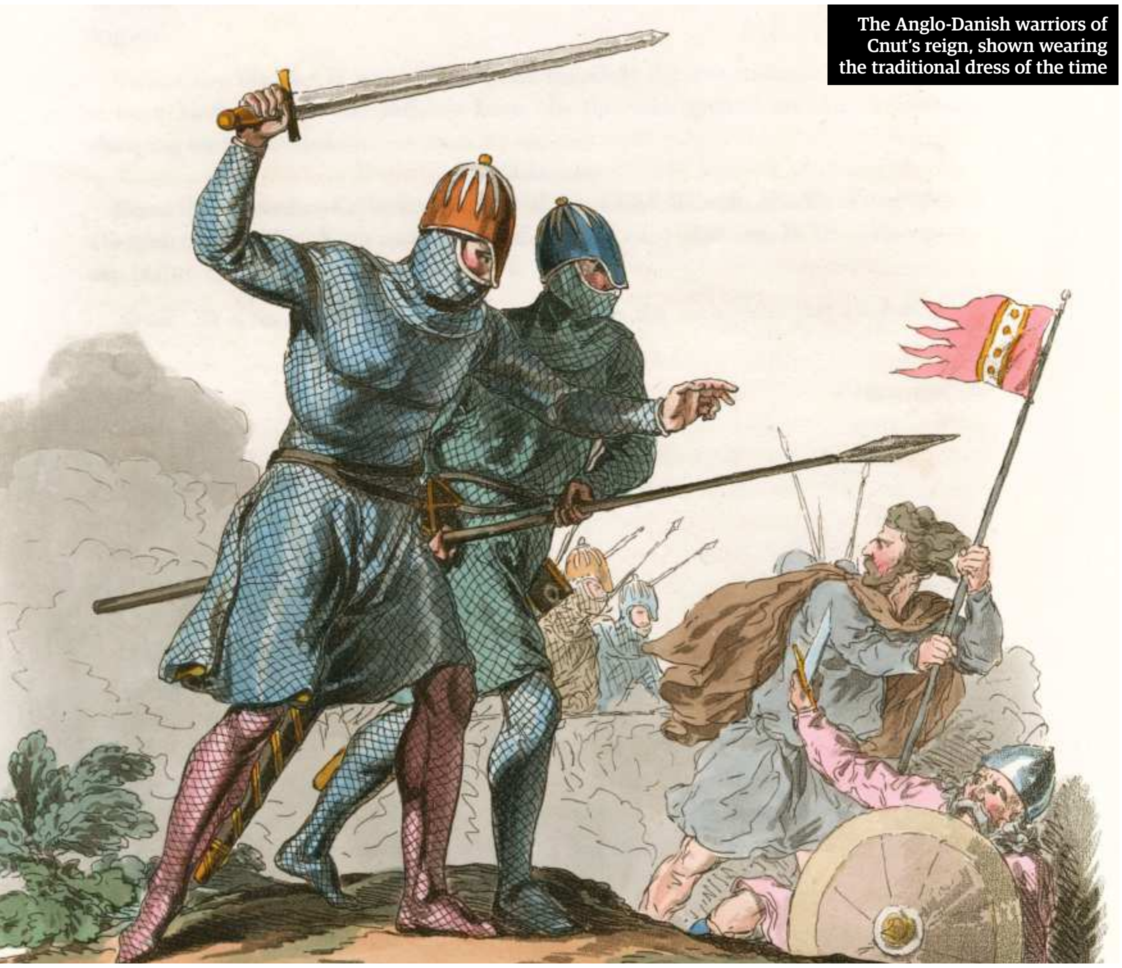
At the time, it was likely that the people of England were filled with trepidation at these developments. Given the ruthless nature of Viking raids on the country, there was a real chance that the new king would milk England for all it was worth, and early signs did little to dispel that impression. Within a year, Cnut was ruthlessly removing those who he felt were plotting against him including Eadric Streona, Earl of Mercia, whose treachery to the old regime had become a byword for duplicity and untrustworthiness.

Then in 1018 he raised the highest Danegeld payment yet; £10,500 from London and £72,000 from the rest of England, massive amounts in the context of the times. But there was a sub-text to this move: Cnut's intention was to use the money to pay off Viking raiders that he no longer had a use for now that the war had been won. This would allow him to govern as he wanted to.

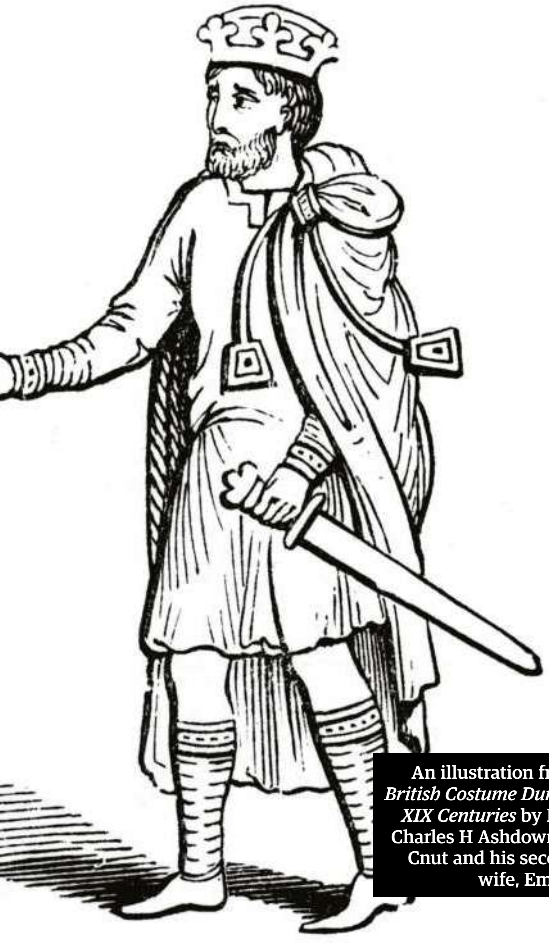
The first sign that there was something to this young man other than the attributes of a rip-roaring Viking raider occurred at around the same time. At a Parliament at Oxford, Cnut adopted the laws of the late King Edgar, seen as one of the greatest of all English monarchs. Edgar's reign was perceived as a Golden Age, a time of peace and prosperity. This was a canny move by Cnut.

It followed another notable step when he married Emma, widow of the late king Æthelred. Emma had two children from her first marriage; Edward (later King Edward the Confessor) and Alfred. Cnut also had two children from a previous relationship with Ælfgifu of Northampton, named Sweyn and Harold (later Harold Harefoot, King of England). Emma soon after her marriage to Cnut gave birth to another son, Harthacnut.

The death, soon after, of Cnut's childless elder brother, Harald, left Denmark open and Cnut soon installed himself as king there, seemingly with little opposition. Cnut, at around the same time, strengthened his hold on England by the judicious appointment of strong supporters in positions of



The Anglo-Danish warriors of Cnut's reign, shown wearing the traditional dress of the time

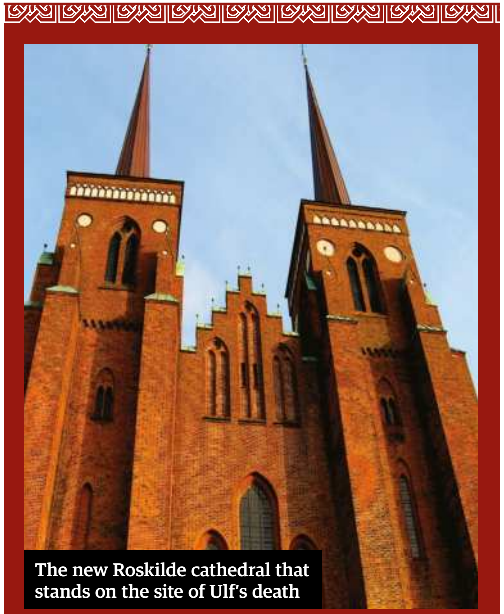


An illustration from *British Costume During XIX Centuries* by Mrs Charles H Ashdown of Cnut and his second wife, Emma

authority in the country. Most prominent among these was Earl Godwin, who Cnut appointed as his representative in the crucial sub-kingdom of Wessex. Godwin would marry the sister of Cnut's brother-in-law. They would have a number of children, including Harold, who would himself become king of England and end his life, allegedly, with an arrow in his eye, at the Battle of Hastings in 1066.

Norway too had once been part of the empire of Sweyn Forkbeard, Cnut's father. However, it had not remained so for long before a rebellion there threw off Danish rule. The beneficiary of that uprising and the current king of Norway was a man named Olaf Haraldsson. Olaf allied himself with the king of Sweden and together they raised an army with a view to attacking Denmark. Cnut got together an army of his own to face up to the threat. The two forces clashed in southern Sweden at the Battle of Helgeå. It was an indecisive confrontation, but Cnut succeeded in hanging on to Denmark.

Shortly after the ruthless elimination of his brother-in-law, Ulf, in Roskilde Cathedral, which followed on soon after, Cnut undertook perhaps the greatest mission of his life when he journeyed to Rome to be present at the coronation of the Holy Roman emperor, Conrad II. To be in attendance at this ceremony was a great mark of recognition for a man who was effectively a Viking king. It made a great impression on many at home and in Europe.



The new Roskilde cathedral that stands on the site of Ulf's death

Murder in the cathedral

Cnut's involvement in the elimination of his brother-in-law Ulf

Although Cnut proved himself to be a strong and successful king, on several occasions during his reign he found himself at odds with his supporters and even members of his extended family. Ulf was Cnut's brother-in-law, married to his sister Estrid. In the lead-up to the Battle of Holy River, there were suggestions that Ulf's loyalty was suspect. Cnut's young son, Harthacnut, was in Denmark as its nominal ruler and it seems that Ulf tried to dominate political affairs there in the absence of a powerful king resident in the country.

Nevertheless, Ulf appears to have been with Cnut when he took part in the hard-fought battle at Helgeå. After, they returned to Denmark together to the royal capital, Roskilde. There was soon a family squabble, according to some accounts over something as trivial as a chess game. It may though have been something less insignificant such as a breakdown in trust between the two that led to Cnut's next action.

Clearly angered by something that had taken place, Cnut sent men to eliminate Ulf once and for all. They found him inside Roskilde Cathedral, though some accounts say Ulf was on the royal farm. However, the cathedral was not the imposing building that one sees now with the tombs of many of Denmark's later monarchs, but a much humbler wooden 'stave' church of simple design and intimate size. While some men hesitated to carry out orders given the sacred nature of the place, one of them, Ivar White, had no such scruples and struck Ulf dead.

This unchristian act must have created alarm and as Cnut was able to survive this incident with his reputation relatively intact speaks highly of his political skills. However, it would seem that his own sister was not prepared to give him the benefit of the doubt and her son Sweyn was sent into protective exile for the remainder of Cnut's life. Cnut paid large sums of money to Estrid to allow her to build a grander structure at Roskilde perhaps as a way of salving a guilty conscience.

Perhaps the most significant part of Cnut's reign was the way in which he built close relationships with the Church. He was a generous patron of a number of religious establishments in both England and Denmark. He also appointed allies into key positions of influence in the Church, such as when Æthelnoth was made archbishop of Canterbury in 1020. This helped to build his influence and reputation, and further strengthen his position.

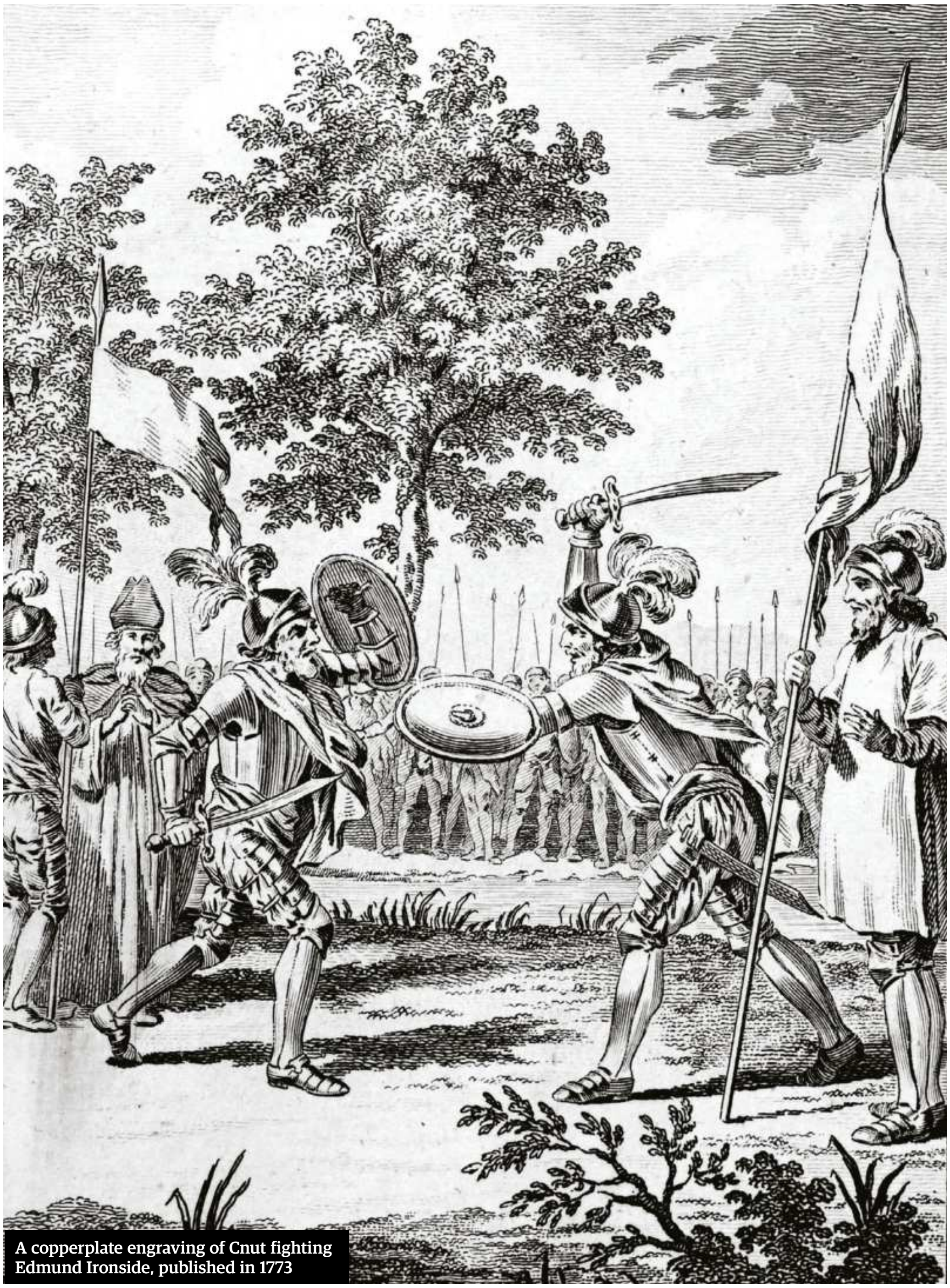
However, the question of Norway was unfinished business as far as Cnut was concerned. Following his return from the indecisive battle at Helgeå, King Olaf's position had become increasingly fragile back in Norway. It was then a very fragmented country with a number of regions, especially those positioned in the wild north that were virtually ungovernable. Cnut took advantage of the significant wealth of England to make gifts to disaffected nobles in Norway. When he arrived with a massive army, the position of Olaf quickly collapsed totally.

Olaf was forced to flee for his life, but he returned soon after in a vain attempt to reclaim the country. At his side was his half-brother Harald, who later – as Harald Hardrada ('the Ruthless') – was to become one of the most famous of all Vikings and would meet his end in a cataclysmic encounter at Stamford Bridge in Yorkshire in 1066. Olaf lost his life in the battle at Stiklestad. Olaf was a staunch Christian ruler and soon after his death was canonised. Saint Olaf would prove much more successful in death than King Olaf ever was in life.

But Cnut did not prove a success as king of Norway. He appointed his first wife, Ælfgifu, as his regent in the country along with their son, Sweyn. However, a disastrous famine undermined their position; this was a time of great suffering across much of the continent and not just in Scandinavia. Their rule was allegedly very harsh and there were a number of revolts that led to the collapse of Cnut's regime there. Olaf's son, Magnus, soon became king in his stead.

Norway was only ever a temporary part of Cnut's 'empire'. Perhaps the dispersed nature of the territories that Cnut ruled made them inherently hard to govern. Certainly the diversity of his subjects, and the relative 'newness' of all three core countries in it – England, Denmark and Norway – presented him with great challenges. It was a tough act for anyone to pull off and certainly there were indications that some of those around him, especially the sons who would have to run his territories after his death – and to a significant extent would be expected to do so when he was alive – were not up to the task, though there were as yet but young.

Cnut certainly had imperial pretensions. His visit to Rome made a great impact on him. He was so impressed at the grandeur and magnificence of the great Imperial Crown worn by Conrad II at his coronation that he had a replica made for himself. Letters back to England soon afterwards included several implicit imperial references – for example, when Cnut ostentatiously described himself as "King of England, Denmark, Norway [not at the time conquered] and part of Sweden". There was little doubt that Cnut had seen something of the magnificence and associated power that came from being an emperor that he took to modelling himself on one to a certain extent.


A copperplate engraving of Cnut fighting Edmund Ironside, published in 1773

"On a visit to the north of England late in his reign, he walked five miles barefoot to visit the tomb of the revered Saint Cuthbert"

Yet, paradoxically, Cnut also became renowned for his humility. His great generosity to the Christian Church has already been mentioned, but his actions also won respect. On a visit to the north of England late in his reign, he walked five miles barefoot to visit the tomb of the revered Saint Cuthbert in Durham. Chroniclers of the time wrote of a man who was more monk than king. Although these attributes may have been exaggerated, as was common with the chroniclers of the time, this suggests a man who wanted to make a strong impression for his Christian acts.

Turning back the tide

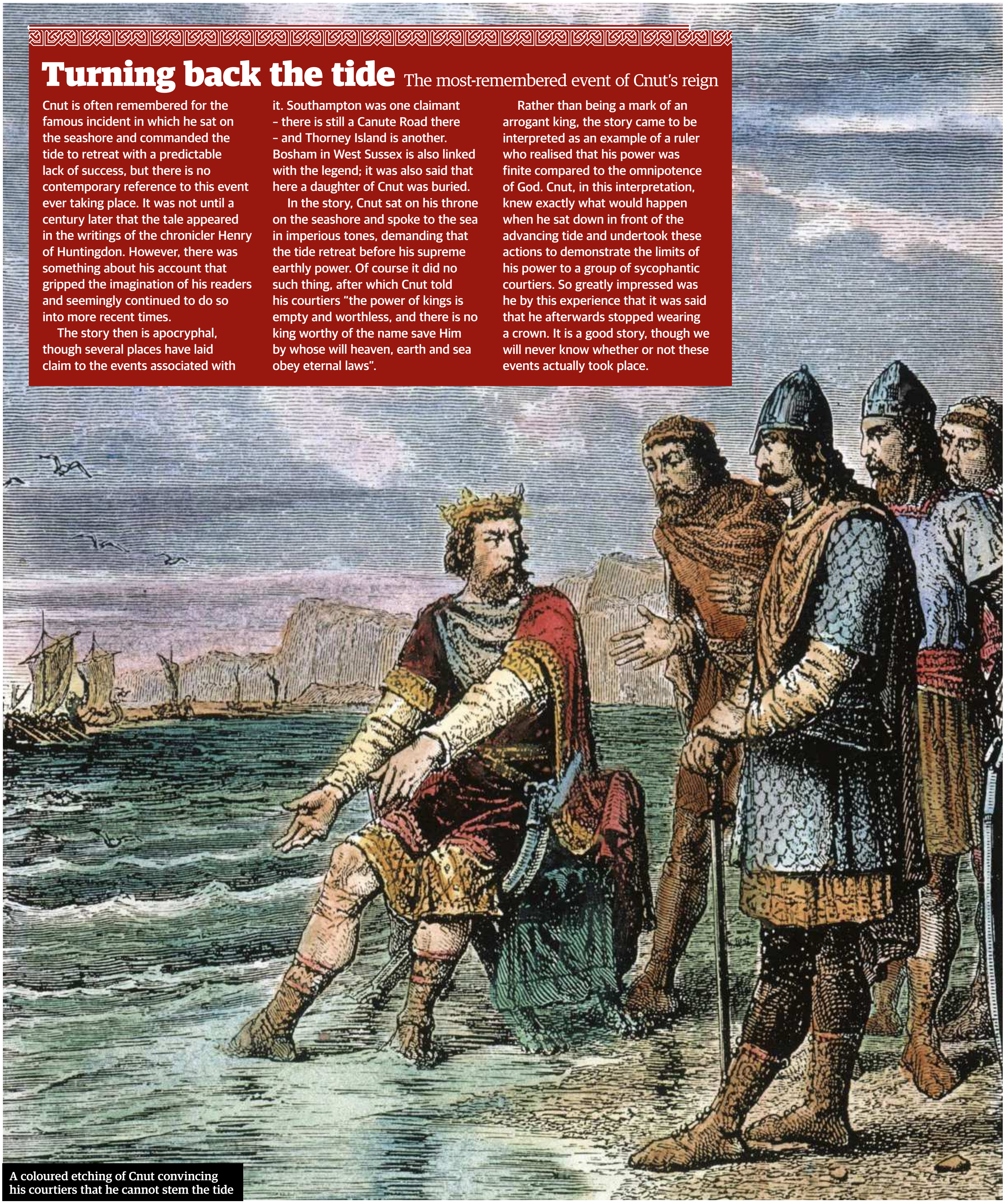
The most-remembered event of Cnut's reign

Cnut is often remembered for the famous incident in which he sat on the seashore and commanded the tide to retreat with a predictable lack of success, but there is no contemporary reference to this event ever taking place. It was not until a century later that the tale appeared in the writings of the chronicler Henry of Huntingdon. However, there was something about his account that gripped the imagination of his readers and seemingly continued to do so into more recent times.

The story then is apocryphal, though several places have laid claim to the events associated with it. Southampton was one claimant – there is still a Canute Road there – and Thorney Island is another. Bosham in West Sussex is also linked with the legend; it was also said that here a daughter of Cnut was buried.

In the story, Cnut sat on his throne on the seashore and spoke to the sea in imperious tones, demanding that the tide retreat before his supreme earthly power. Of course it did no such thing, after which Cnut told his courtiers "the power of kings is empty and worthless, and there is no king worthy of the name save Him by whose will heaven, earth and sea obey eternal laws".

Rather than being a mark of an arrogant king, the story came to be interpreted as an example of a ruler who realised that his power was finite compared to the omnipotence of God. Cnut, in this interpretation, knew exactly what would happen when he sat down in front of the advancing tide and undertook these actions to demonstrate the limits of his power to a group of sycophantic courtiers. So greatly impressed was he by this experience that it was said that he afterwards stopped wearing a crown. It is a good story, though we will never know whether or not these events actually took place.



A coloured etching of Cnut convincing his courtiers that he cannot stem the tide

This was an approach that was perhaps based as much on the political advantages that came from it as from any deeply held personal convictions. It made Cnut a 'modern' ruler, one who could sit at the high table of European politics as an equal rather than be regarded with suspicion by his fellow rulers as a potential raider.

This brought him great political benefits, and perhaps the most significant was his alliance with Conrad II. Denmark and the Holy Roman Empire shared a border - one that had been porous and problematic - but the alliance brought stability, enabling Cnut to concentrate his efforts on his unfinished business in Norway. Conrad's son married Cnut's daughter, Gunhilda - a sign of the great importance of Cnut in European affairs.

> "Cnut lived a very active life and it seems to have taken its toll"

Alongside this, Cnut appeared to retain other more 'Viking' characteristics. From what we know, he was a lover of the sagas every bit as much as more traditional Scandinavian rulers had been before him. He himself appears in Viking sagas, though reflecting these extraordinary changing times the heroes here were now typically Christian rather than followers of Odin or Thor. This was a sure sign that the world was changing rapidly, though some parts of Scandinavia would stay stubbornly pagan well beyond the period covered by Cnut's reign. For example, Uppsala in Sweden was long a centre of worship for the old gods and half a century after Cnut's death the Christian writer Adam of Bremen was writing of the horrific rites of animal and human sacrifice that were still practised there.

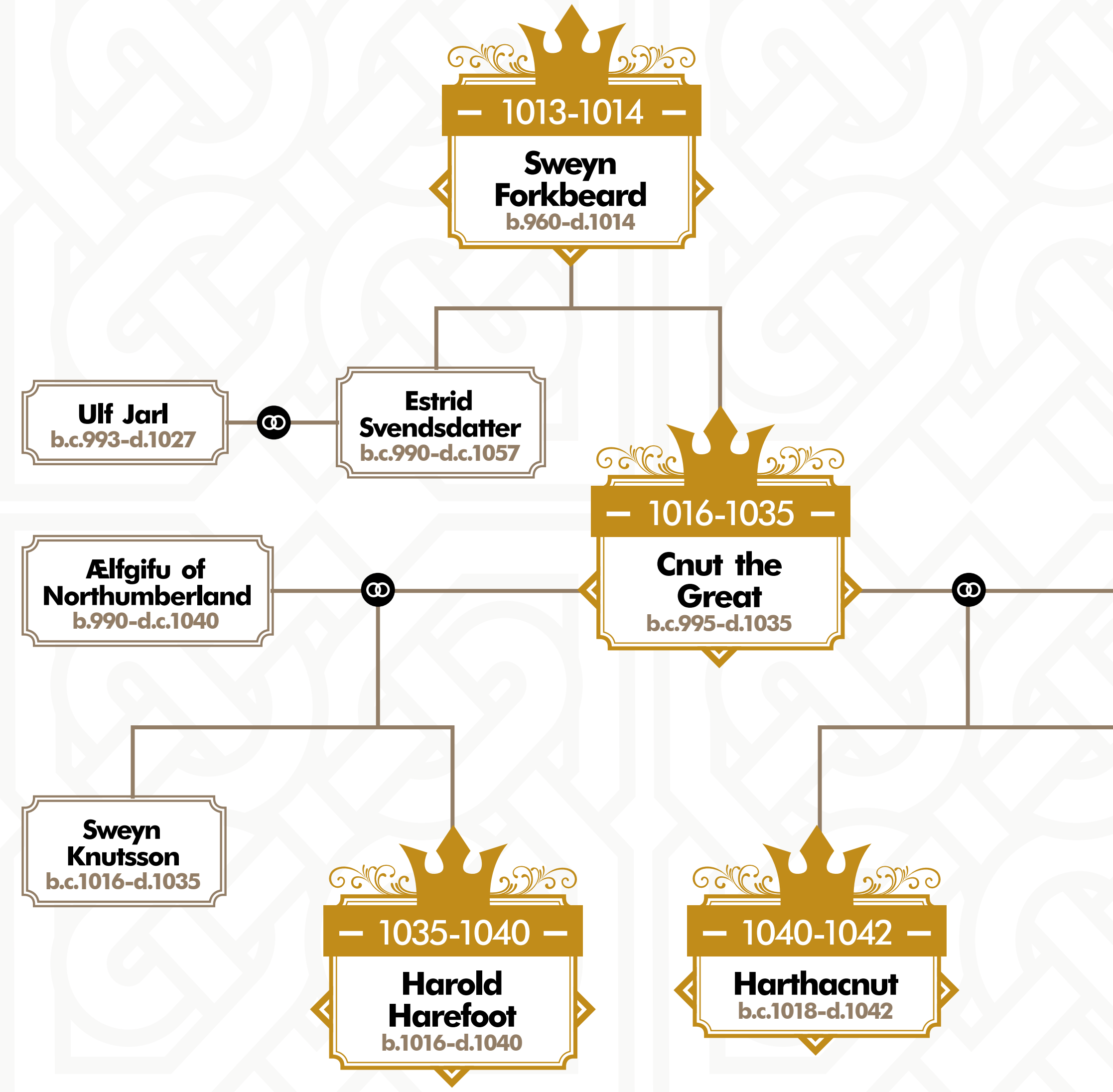
However, Cnut lived a very active life and it seems to have taken its toll. There are a few hints that he was suffering from some illness that was wearing him down and on 12 November 1035 he breathed his last at Shaftesbury in Dorset. The place of his death is symbolically interesting as the tomb of the martyred English king and saint, Edward resided there. Throughout his life, Cnut had acted with great respect towards the English royal family that he had replaced. He, as we have seen, emphasised his appreciation of the late, great Edgar by adopting his laws. He even visited the tomb of Edmund Ironside at Glastonbury Abbey where he left behind a splendid gift of cloak adorned with peacock feathers, a symbol of both Imperial Byzantine grandeur and Christian resurrection.

His magnanimity marked him out as a wise man, able to build bridges with the people that he had conquered. Although he taxed his people heavily, they, for their part, seem to have accepted his right to rule them; he did at least give them peace and security, a welcome contrast to the four decades that preceded his reign. He was generally regarded by them with respect rather than love. But it was a welcome breathing space after the trauma of the reign of Æthelred 'the Unready'.

Cnut was buried in the great Anglo-Saxon royal mausoleum in Winchester. Here he metaphorically rubbed shoulders with other English kings and saints. In its own way it was another sign of a king who wished to assimilate rather than dictate to his English subjects. Ironically Cnut's bones were not to find peace in death. In the 16th century, his remains, and those of his wife, Emma, were packed together into a mortuary chest and placed high in the presbytery of Winchester Cathedral.

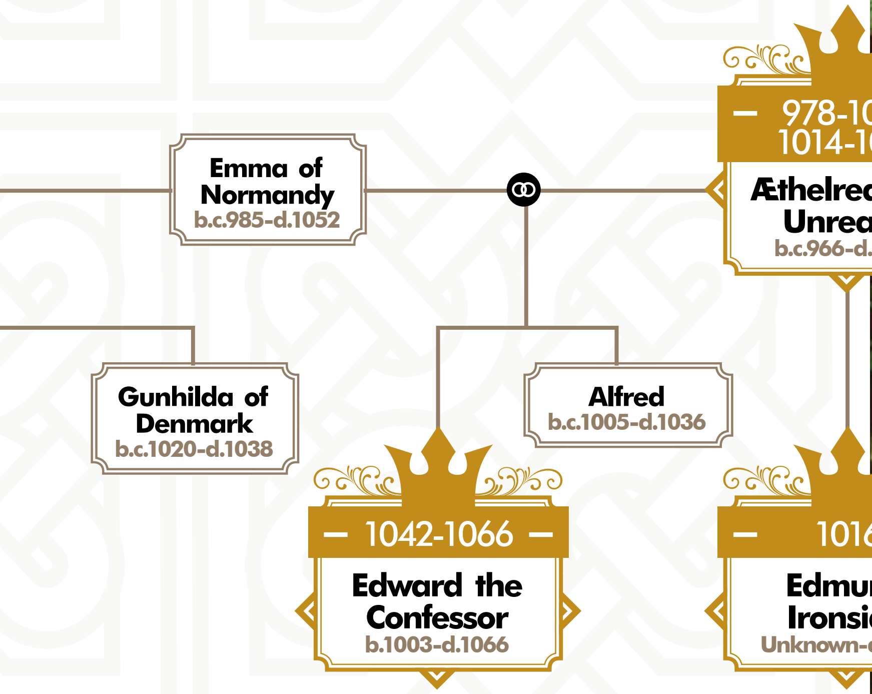
England's Viking overlords

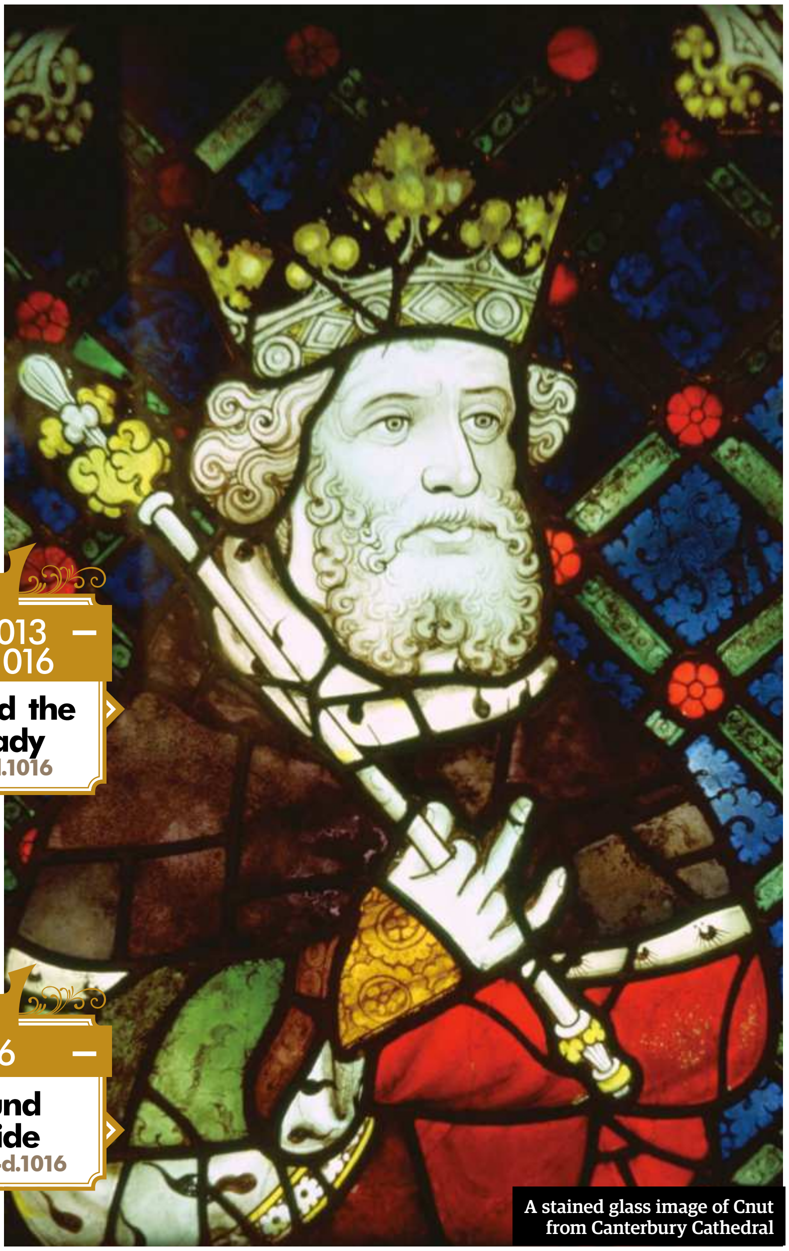
Discover the lineage of England's Viking rulers



The obverse (front) of a silver penny of King Cnut, dated c.1017-1023

> "Cnut was the only king to ever rule both England and Denmark. He managed England's great wealth to full advantage"




A stained glass image of Cnut from Canterbury Cathedral

When Winchester Cathedral was entered by Parliamentarian forces in the great English Civil War of the 17th century, anti-monarchist soldiers broke open the chests and used the leg bones to break the splendid stained glass of the West Window. Following the restoration of the English monarchy in 1660, the bones were gathered together and placed in the mortuary chests once more, but by this time they were hopelessly jumbled up; no one knew who went where. At the time of writing, a temporary laboratory has been set up in Winchester Cathedral to try and match the right bones with the right mortuary chests so that Cnut and Emma can once more rest side by side in peace.

The greatness of Cnut's achievements in building an extended kingdom that encompassed both England and Scandinavia can perhaps best be demonstrated by how quickly his 'empire' began to fall apart after his death. Without his great energy, vision and drive, his successors were incapable of keeping it together. Harold Harefoot, his son from his union with Ælfgifu of Northampton, and Harthacnut, from his marriage with Emma, both became king in due course, but neither lasted for very long, nor gave any indication that, had they lived, they would have actually been very successful monarchs.

Harold became sole king of England after Cnut's death but died himself soon after. As a result, Harthacnut then became king, but he too did not survive very long, dying after overindulging at a wedding feast. With none of Cnut's sons now living, in 1042 the throne reverted back to the Anglo-Saxon bloodline when Edward 'the Confessor' became king. He was able to trace his ancestry back to the line of Cerdic of Wessex, a 6th-century ruler who claimed descent from both Adam of biblical fame and the Germanic/Norse god Woden/Odin. In a somewhat diluted form, after several diversions across the centuries that have followed, traces of that bloodline still remain in today's British royal family.

Cnut was the only king to ever rule both England and Denmark (if we were to exclude the short reign of Harthacnut). He capably governed both, dexterously managing England's great wealth to full advantage and emulating some of the most significant elements of government to build a strong nation-state in Denmark. He used English churchmen to help build the young Church in Denmark as well as using more practical tools such as the employment of English moneyers to develop Danish coinage.

It would be true to say that the practical results of King Cnut's leadership were more deeply felt in the long run in Denmark than England, but his reign was nonetheless a fascinating period in English and European history and a remarkable achievement in its own right.

EDWARD THE CONFESSOR

Edward brought the country stability and prosperity, but his failure to secure the succession to the throne left England open to war

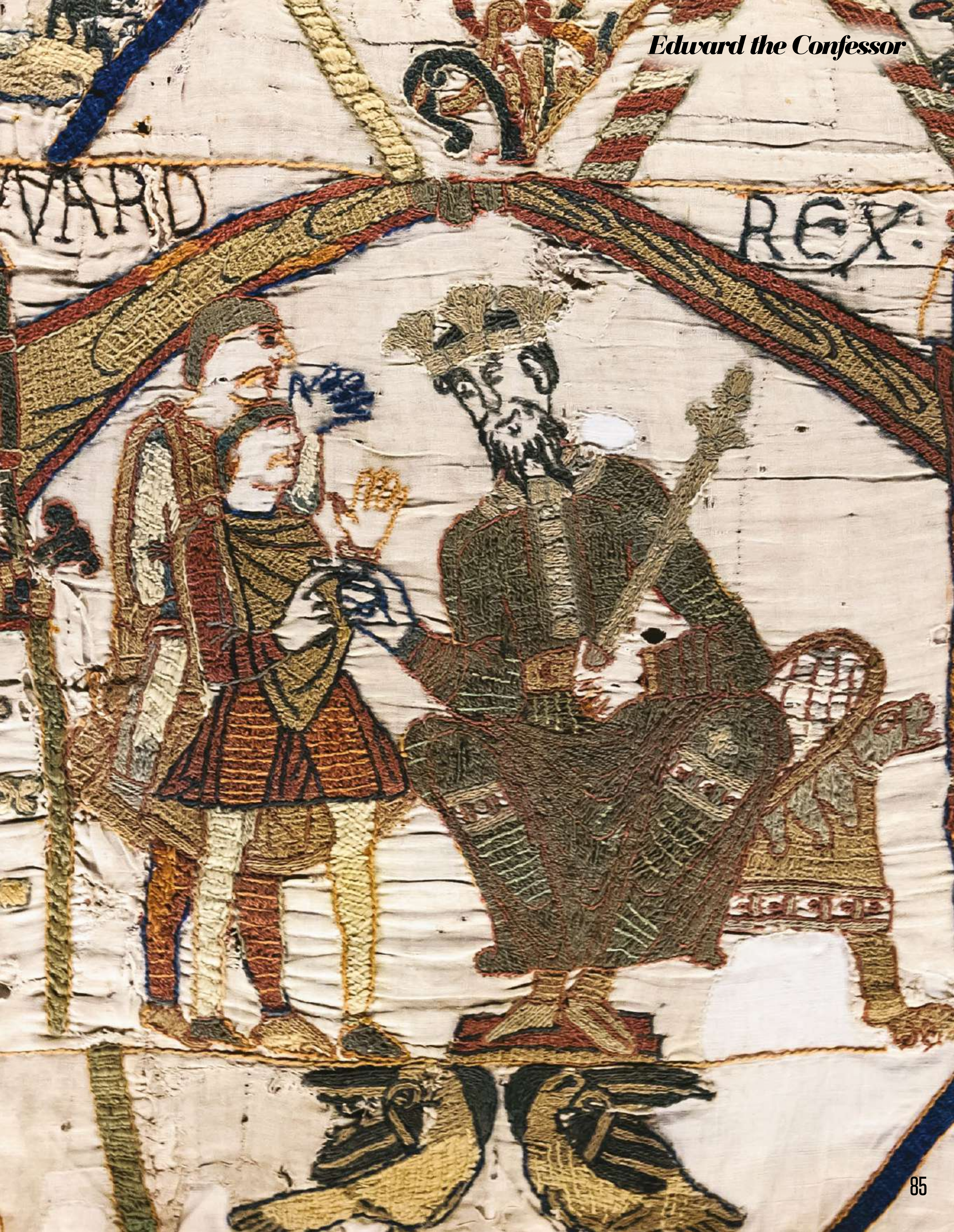
Edward was born in a country being torn apart by raiders and invaders. He was the eldest son of King Æthelred and his second wife, Emma of Normandy. Æthelred had already produced at least six sons by his first wife, so he was hardly in need of further heirs. But what he did need was to secure the ports across the Channel from Viking raiders.

The Normans were descendants of Vikings who had settled in the valley of the lower Seine in the early 10th century and been granted the land by Charles the Simple of France in return for securing his northern borders against Viking raiders.

A century later, with the Norman duchy well established, Æthelred attempted to do the same for his own realm. The Vikings who were harrying England were using the ports of Normandy as safe havens and they found a ready welcome among their Norman cousins. But the widowed Æthelred arranged a marriage with Emma, the sister of Richard the Good, Duke of Normandy, in 1002. Much good did it do him or England. Though the Normans largely kept their side of the bargain, Æthelred had made such a hash of defending England that, when Sweyn Forkbeard landed with his invading army in 1013, the demoralised defenders offered barely any resistance. In a telling comment on what she thought of her husband, Emma fled to Normandy with her two sons by Æthelred - Edward had a younger brother called Alfred - leaving the king behind. Æthelred himself followed later, only to return to England in 1014 when Sweyn Forkbeard died. His Viking army declared for Forkbeard's son, Cnut, but Æthelred's eldest son, Edmund Ironside, led the fightback and Æthelred was invited back - whereupon the resistance promptly crumbled again. On 23 April 1016, Æthelred finally did something for his country: he died. Edmund renewed the resistance to the Danish takeover, fighting Cnut through the summer and autumn and only losing the decisive battle through the treachery of Æthelred's chief adviser, Eadric Streona. Edmund died soon afterwards and Edward, who had been part of his half-brother's army, fled into exile once more. With Cnut now secure on the throne, Edward can't have expected to return.

> Edward also had a sister, Godgifu, who married Drogo, Count of the Vexin, and then, when he died, Eustace, Count of Boulogne

His prospects declined even further when Cnut invited Edward's mother, Emma, to come back over the Channel and take a second bite at being queen. Emma promptly accepted and, leaving her sons behind in Normandy, married Cnut - despite him already having sons through his handfast wife,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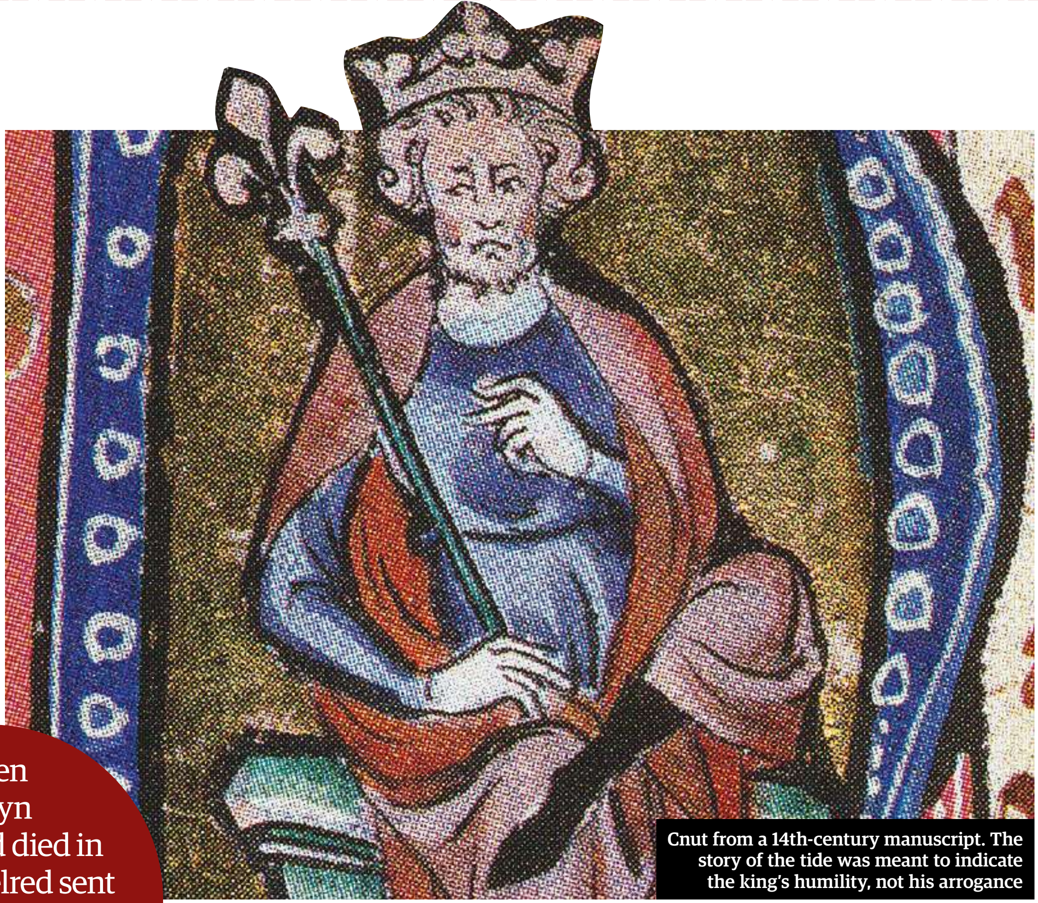


Cnut from a 14th-century manuscript. The story of the tide was meant to indicate the king's humility, not his arrogance

Ælfgifu. As part of the marriage settlement, Emma probably extracted the promise that the children of her marriage would have priority in succession and so she set about producing another heir: Harthacnut was born in 1018.

All but abandoned by their mother, Edward and his brother Alfred grew to manhood in Normandy. With Cnut so dominant a king - and having three sons by two wives - there was little prospect of the young men ever returning to the country of their birth. In most such cases, they would have slipped into obscurity, forgotten by history. But Cnut died on 12 November 1035 when he was about 40.

Emma immediately swung into action, supporting her son, Harthacnut, for the succession. But the problem was that Harthacnut was detained in Denmark as he sought to establish his rule there - Cnut had ruled a North Sea empire comprising Denmark, Norway, England and parts of Sweden - while Cnut's son with Ælfgifu, Harold Harefoot, was on the ground in England and stoking his claim to the throne.

In some desperation, Emma remembered her other boys, living across the Channel, who also had claim to the throne. In 1036, Edward sailed back to England for the first time since he was a boy on a crown-fishing expedition. When he was met by an army rather than acclaim, Edward decided that his mother's assurances of welcome were as trustworthy as her maternal feelings and sailed back to Normandy. But later in the year, his younger brother Alfred decided to try his luck.

> When Sweyn Forkbeard died in 1014, Æthelred sent his ten-year-old son Edward to England to help negotiate his return

Alfred and his men were met by Earl Godwin, the most powerful Englishman in the land. The Godwin family had risen to prominence from obscure origins under Cnut. Godwin welcomed Alfred and his men and took them to Guildford, feasting and entertaining them. Then, as they slept off the feast, they were attacked. Alfred's men were variously killed, enslaved, mutilated and scalped. Alfred himself was taken prisoner but, in captivity, his eyes were put out: a blind man could not claim the throne. The young prince soon succumbed to his wounds. Earl Godwin had been, with Emma, a supporter of Harthacnut, but with this wet work Godwin successfully ingratiated himself with Harold Harefoot. In Harthacnut's continuing absence, Harold Harefoot was crowned king - and Emma was sent into exile. Not to Normandy - where Edward might have given her a frosty reception - but to Flanders.

However, Emma was not yet finished with being queen. She commissioned her defence, a work exonerating her of all blame, and renewed her contacts with Harthacnut. In England, Harold Harefoot fell ill and died on 17 March 1040. Emma sailed back to England with her son Harthacnut, a queen once more.

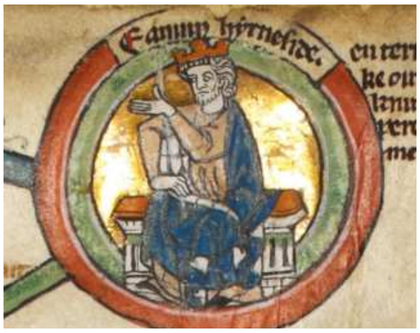
But then, in 1041, something really extraordinary happened: Harthacnut invited his half-brother Edward over from Normandy to rule alongside him. Kings not being known for voluntarily sharing power, it may be that Harthacnut needed Edward

Defining moment

Born into interesting times

c.1004

Edward, the first child of King Æthelred the Unready's second wife, is born somewhere around 1004. It could have been 1003 or 1005. The uncertainty shows how little attention was paid to him when he was young: as a prince with a distant claim to the throne, it was not worth recording his birth in annals such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Edward is born in the midst of repeated Viking attacks that are grinding down the ability of the English to resist.



Timeline

1013
Into exile
Sweyn Forkbeard invades England. Emma, the queen, flees to relatives in Normandy, taking both her sons, Edward and Alfred, with her.

1014
The return of the king (unfortunately)
Æthelred returns to reclaim the throne and promptly cripples the fight against Sweyn's son, Cnut.

23 April 1016
Death of another king
Æthelred finally dies. His son, Edmund Ironside, leads the struggle against the Danes.

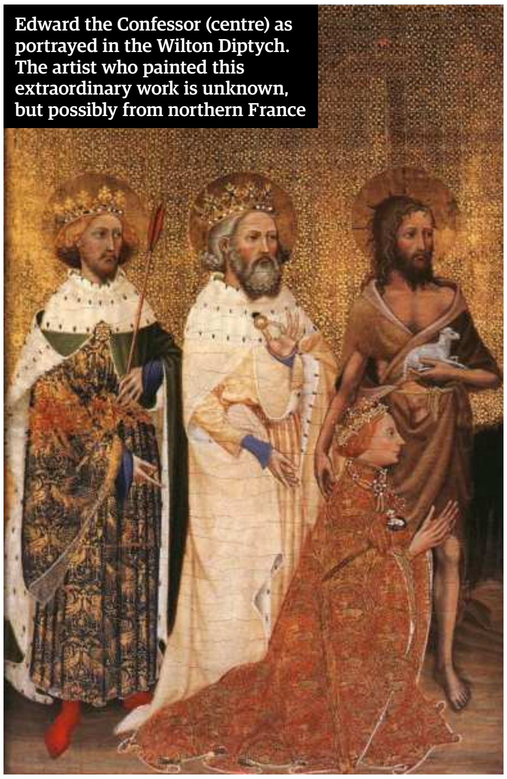
30 November 1016
Death of a third king
Edmund Ironside dies. Sweyn's son, Cnut, is now the unopposed king. Edward returns to exile.

July 1017
A queen again
Edward's mother, Emma, leaving her children in Normandy, returns to England to marry Cnut and reign as his queen.

1016-35
The forgotten exile
With Cnut secure on the throne, Edward lives in exile with his relatives in Normandy.

12 November 1035
The tide sweeps Cnut away
Cnut dies. Emma backs her son, Harthacnut, for the throne of England but he is delayed in Denmark.

1036
Edward tries his luck
Edward lands in England with a small army but is forced to withdraw.



Edward the Confessor (centre) as portrayed in the Wilton Diptych. The artist who painted this extraordinary work is unknown, but possibly from northern France

to help shore up his increasingly unpopular reign, but a simpler explanation may be that Harthacnut was ailing and feared he had little time left to live. No doubt Emma, keen to install another son on the throne, suggested Edward as both stop gap and potential successor.

Whatever the solution to this riddle, on 8 June 1042, Harthacnut died at a wedding feast. Edward, by this time in his late 30s, was, most unexpectedly, the new king of England.

Though king, Edward's position was unusually weak: he had no power base in the country and, in a time when power depended as much on personal relationships and ties as armed force, he was a stranger in a strange land. As such, he had no choice but to depend on his earls, of whom the most powerful was Godwin - the man he held responsible for the death of his younger brother. Besides, he could use Godwin's help to deal with a long-standing problem of his own: his mother.

In November 1043, with Earl Godwin by his side, Edward rode to his mother's base in Winchester and stripped her of her treasures. Although Emma did earn partial rehabilitation, her scheming came to an end and this most remarkable of women died on 7 March 1052, being buried beside Cnut and Harthacnut in Winchester.

Such favours required payback and Godwin's terms were steep: on 23 January 1045, his daughter, Edith, married Edward. Thus, this earl of obscure background and humble origins might look towards his grandson becoming king of England. It was a heady prospect.

Godwin's sons prospered alongside their sister, with his eldest sons, Sweyn and Harold, raised to earldoms. The family now ruled most of southern England - an uncomfortable, perhaps unconscionable, situation for the king. For, in 1051, Edward moved against the Godwin family.

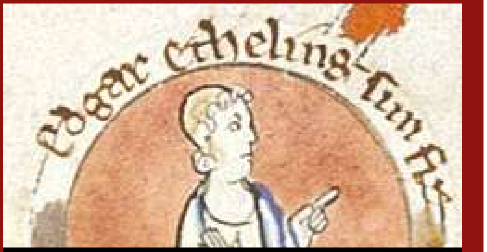
The cause of the dispute was a struggle over the appointment of the archbishop of Canterbury, but it became a struggle for mastery of the realm. Edward called in the support of the northern earls, while Godwin and his sons raised their own armies. But, as the rival armies converged on London, Godwin's men, reluctant to fight the king, slipped away, leaving the earl in an untenable position. When he sought to negotiate with Edward, the king sent back the reply that Godwin could have peace "when he gave him back his brother alive".

The Godwins fled in exile. As for the queen, Edward put her into a convent. As 1051 drew to a close, Edward could think himself now truly master of the land he ruled. But, in exile, the Godwins were planning their return.

Did Edward really promise William the crown?

According to our Norman sources, Edward did. Early in 1051, as part of his campaign to rid himself of the Godwins, the sources say that Edward sent a message to William offering him the crown if he would support Edward in his struggle. William was Edward's first cousin, once removed (Edward's mother and William's grandfather were siblings), so there was a blood relationship, however distant, and Edward had reason to be grateful to the Norman dukes for giving him a home during his long exile. William, not surprisingly, accepted the offer.

But Edward seems to have been all too free with his promises of the crown. In 1057, he recalled the son of Edmund Ironside, also called Edward, to England from his long exile in Hungary. As a direct descendant of the line of kings, Edward the Exile had the strongest claim of anyone to the throne. But, two days after his return, Edward the Exile died. Murdered? We don't know. But his death was certainly convenient for those who were gathering about the throne and its childless king. However, Edward the Exile had a son, Edgar, who inherited his claim. But Edgar was only five or six at the time. Would King Edward live long enough for Edgar's claim to come to the forefront?



Edgar, son of Edward the Exile, the boy with the best claim to the crown of England. Unfortunately, though, he was a boy

Defining moment

King after all c.1041

Harthacnut, against all precedent, invites Edward to return from exile and rule alongside him in England as co-regent. He does this either to shore up his own unpopular rule or because he knows he is ill and, being without any children, he is putting a successor in place should he succumb to his illness. Whichever it is, Edward, by now in his late 30s, finds himself, against all expectations, a king.

Defining moment

Taking down the Godwins c.1051

It started with a dispute over who would be archbishop of Canterbury. Earl Godwin wanted his man, but Edward insisted on making his Norman cleric archbishop. It escalated into a full-on armed confrontation: the king and the northern earls against the Godwins - and the Godwins backed down. With support crumbling, Earl Godwin and his sons fled into exile, while Edward promptly put his queen, Godwin's daughter, into a nunnery. The kingdom was the king's, finally. Or was it…?

1036

Alfred III's luck
Edward's brother tries for the crown, but is captured by Earl Godwin and has his eyes put out. Alfred dies from his wounds.

1037

A new king
Harold Harefoot, another son of Cnut, is crowned king of England.

17 March 1040

Another king bites the dust
Harold Harefoot dies. He is only 24.

17 June 1040

And a new king arrives
Harthacnut lands in England and is crowned king.

8 June 1042

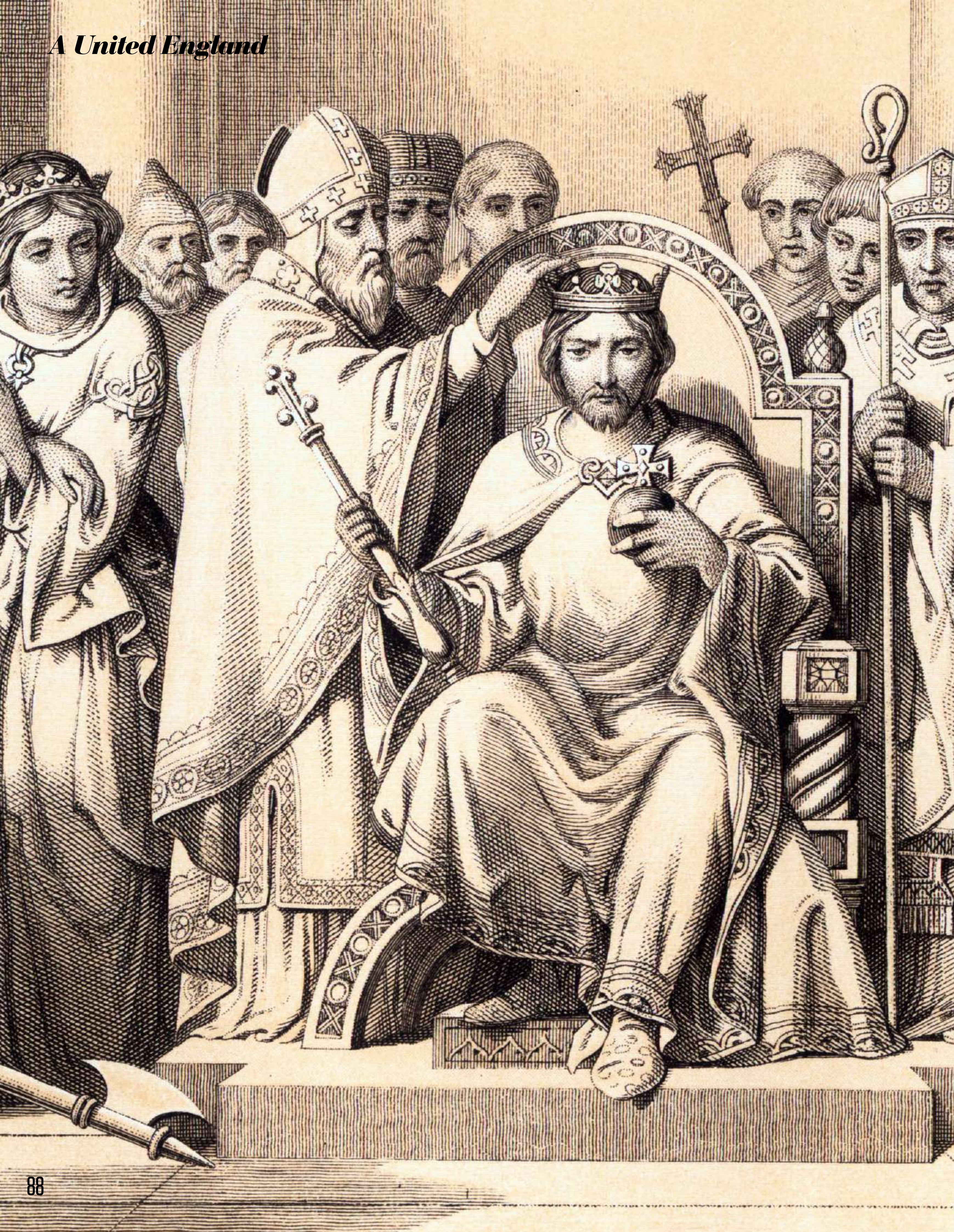
The king is dead, long live the king
Harthacnut dies. Against all expectation, Edward finds himself king of England.

November 1043

Mother troubles
Edward dispossesses his mother, Emma, of her treasures and banishes her from his court.

23 January 1045

A married man
Edward marries Edith, the daughter of Earl Godwin.



THE LAST ANGLO-SAXON KING

Harold, England's most powerful earl, claimed the throne on King Edward's death. But to hold on to the crown, Harold knew he would have to fight

The Godwin family had learned one thing through their years of service to the crown: while men might pay lip service to the rules of succession, in truth the crown went to who could claim and hold it. This knowledge was deep and bitter. Harold's grandfather, Wulfnoth, had been a victim of the plots and rumours that swirled around King Æthelred, but his father, Godwin, had risen to power through loyal service to King Cnut, becoming the most powerful man in the land after the king.

Then, when Cnut died, Godwin had been kingmaker, helping to raise first Harold Harefoot, then Harthacnut, to the throne. When Harthacnut had died, Godwin had eased the accession to the throne of Edward, the unlikely king, thus clearing – at least in the conscience of the earl – the blood guilt he owed Edward for his part in the death of Edward's brother, Alfred. What's more, Earl Godwin had sealed his place as the power behind the throne by marrying his daughter to Edward. Now Earl Godwin could look towards the prospect of his grandson taking the throne of England

But the king had not forgotten what had happened to his brother. And, in 1051, he moved against his over-mighty earl and his family. Edward installed one of his Norman clerics, Robert de Jumièges, as the new archbishop of Canterbury, against the opposition of Earl Godwin. It is likely that Edward gave Robert the task of conveying to the duke of Normandy his offer of the throne when, in the spring of 1051, the priest left England for Rome to receive his pallium from the pope, the vestment signifying his status as an archbishop.

At the end of August, the simmering tension between king and earl broke when Godwin refused to carry out the harrying of the town of Dover that Edward demanded of him following an armed incident between the people of Dover and the retainers of Edward's brother-in-law. Dover was part of Godwin's earldom and he refused to injure the people. Earl confronted king. Godwin and his sons – Sweyn, Harold, Tostig, Gyrth, Leofwine and Wulfnoth – raised armies.

Harold's mistress, Edith Swan-neck, may have been Eadgifu the Fair, one of the largest landholders in England before 1066

But the king had prepared for this confrontation. Calling the northern earls to his side, Edward raised his own forces and England trembled on the edge of civil strife.

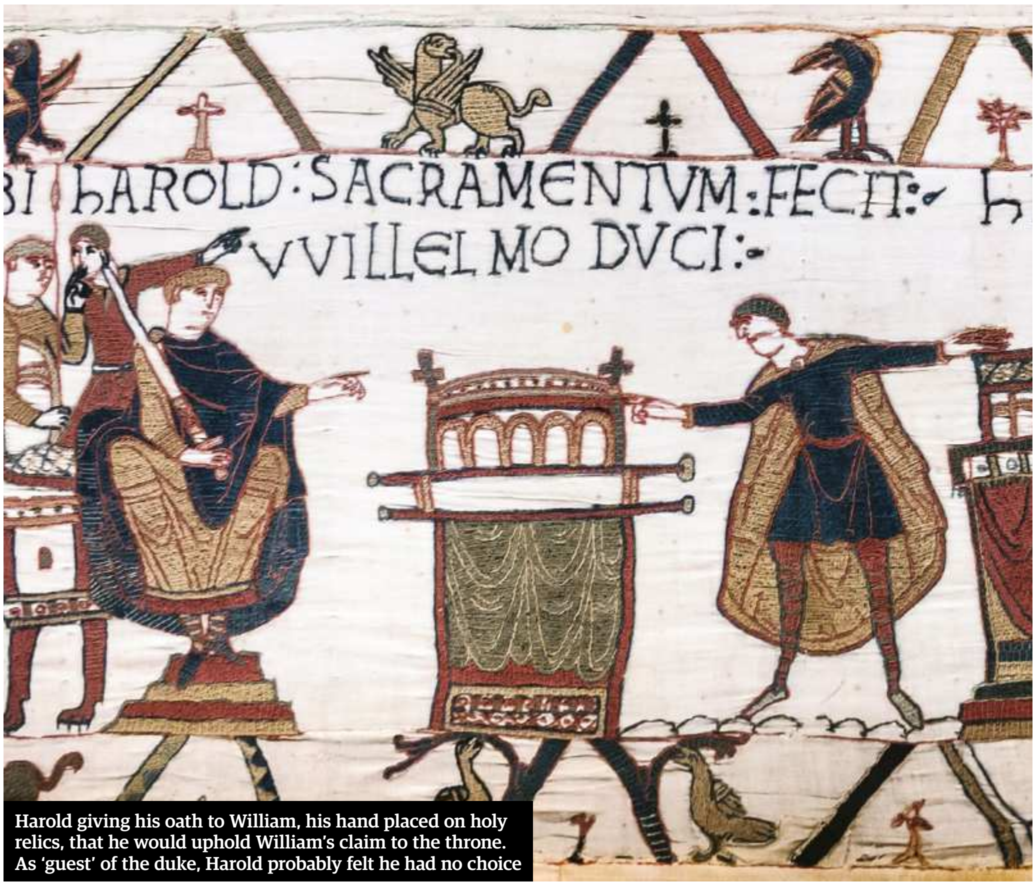
But, seeing such a spectre rise before them, both sides paused. Earl Godwin agreed to come to London to stand before the king and answer the charge of treason. With both armies on opposite banks of the Thames at London, the Godwins

The scandalous life and death of Harold's elder brother

Sweyn Godwinson, the eldest son of Earl Godwin and Harold's elder brother, led a tumultuous life. According to the man himself, he was the son not of Earl Godwin, but of King Cnut. However, his mother denied the claim vehemently. In 1046, Sweyn abducted Eadgifu, the abbess of Leominster, intending to marry her and claim the Leominster estates. When the king refused to agree to the marriage, Sweyn released Eadgifu, who returned to Leominster, while Sweyn fled to Flanders.

In 1049, Sweyn returned, hoping to reclaim his territories, which had been split between Harold and a cousin, Beorn. Beorn eventually agreed to help Sweyn, but Sweyn ended up abducting him too. The end for his cousin was worse than for the abbess: Sweyn murdered him. As a result, Sweyn was outlawed again.

However, Earl Godwin engineered his forgiveness, but when the Godwins were exiled in 1051, Sweyn left the rest of the family to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem and atone for his sins – these being so heinous that he went barefoot. But Sweyn, now purged of his sin, died on the way back before he could sin again.



Harold giving his oath to William, his hand placed on holy relics, that he would uphold William's claim to the throne. As 'guest' of the duke, Harold probably felt he had no choice

realised that the balance of power had shifted decisively against them, for much of their own forces had slipped away, unwilling to fight the king. Edward, seeing this, delivered his terms to Earl Godwin: that he might have peace when he returned the king's brother to him, alive. There would be no terms.

Earl Godwin fled, with his wife and sons Sweyn and Tostig, to Flanders. Harold and Leofwine went into exile in Ireland. The last remaining Godwin in England was the queen, and with her family fled, Edward put Edith into a nunnery. The king finally had his country.

But Edward couldn't keep it. To guard against the Godwin's return, Edward had relied upon the levy of ships he could raise as king. Initially, it seemed to work. However, in 1052, when the Godwins raised their own fleet, the king's boats dispersed, having fulfilled their time of service, leaving the coast unguarded. Earl Godwin's fleet met with a separate armada raised by Harold and Leofwine in Ireland, and sailed unopposed up the Channel, round Kent and up the Thames. By 14 September, they had reached London, anchoring at Southwark. Edward had managed to scrabble together 50 boats to meet them, and again the two sides faced off against each other. The Godwins demanded the king return their land and earldoms. This time, however, support leached away from the king. The rising tide allowed the Godwins' ships to surround Edward's boats, anchored on the north side of the Thames.

The king had lost his country. Robert de Jumièges and Edward's other Norman advisers fled. In a display of political theatre, Earl Godwin met the king, begged his forgiveness and proclaimed his innocence of all charges against him. Edward, humiliated and outmanoeuvred, had no choice but to return to the Godwins all their lands and titles. Not long afterwards, Edward brought his wife and queen out of the convent he had confined her in.

To everyone in England it must have been clear that while Edward wore the crown, the Godwins had the power. But in 1052, the Godwins suffered a reverse with no return: Earl Godwin's eldest son, Sweyn, died.

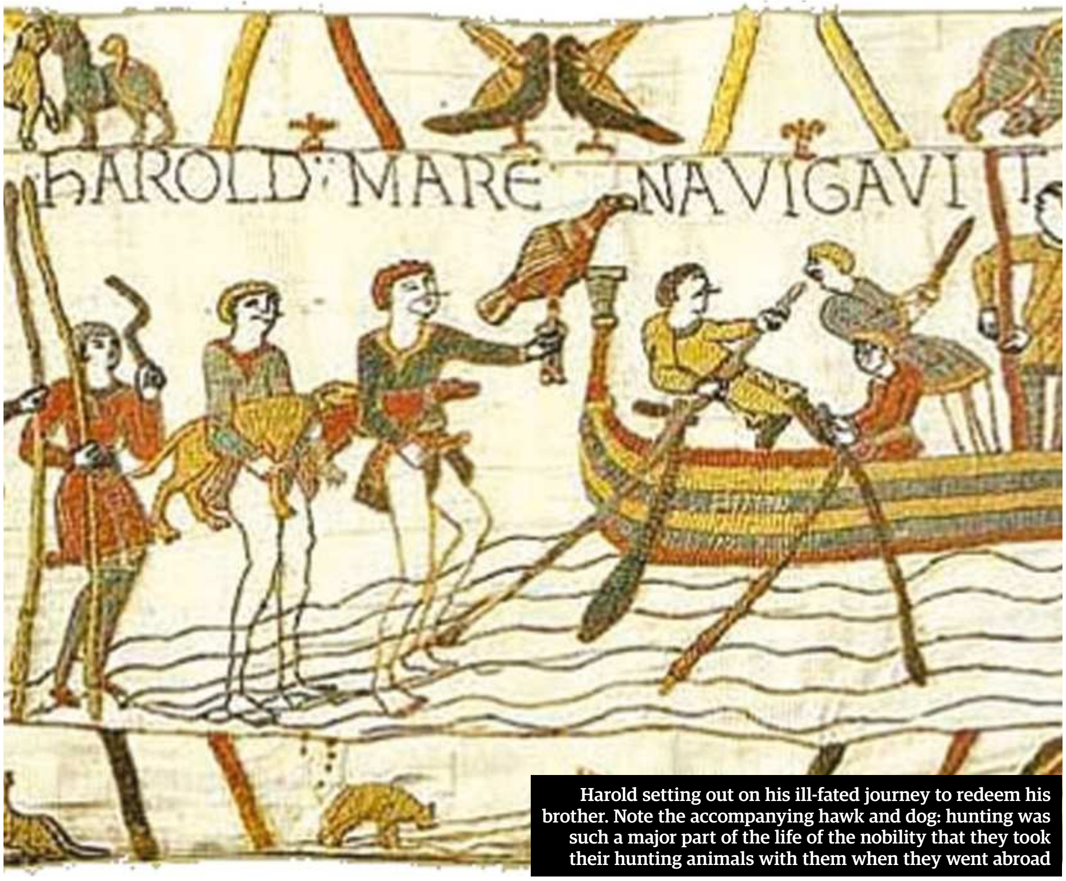
The estates of the Godwinsons produced an income of £8,500 a year in the 1050s; the king's estates returned £6,000

A deeper blow hit the family on 15 April 1053: their patriarch, Earl Godwin, died. According to one chronicler, just before his collapse at the Easter Monday feast, the earl had asked that God not let him swallow if he had done anything to injure either the king or his late brother. From the descriptions of other sources, it seems the earl suffered a stroke. But with the father dead, his eldest surviving son, Harold, succeeded to the earldom of Wessex. As the senior Godwin, Harold moved to promote the interests of his brothers and, in 1055, he engineered the promotion of Tostig to the earldom of Northumbria, while by 1057 he had installed Gyrth as earl of East Anglia and Leofwine as earl of the counties surrounding London. Apart from Mercia, the Godwins were lords of England. And the king, apparently acquiescing, largely withdrew from affairs, contenting himself with attending mass each day, hunting and the building of a new minster, west of London, the Westminster Abbey.

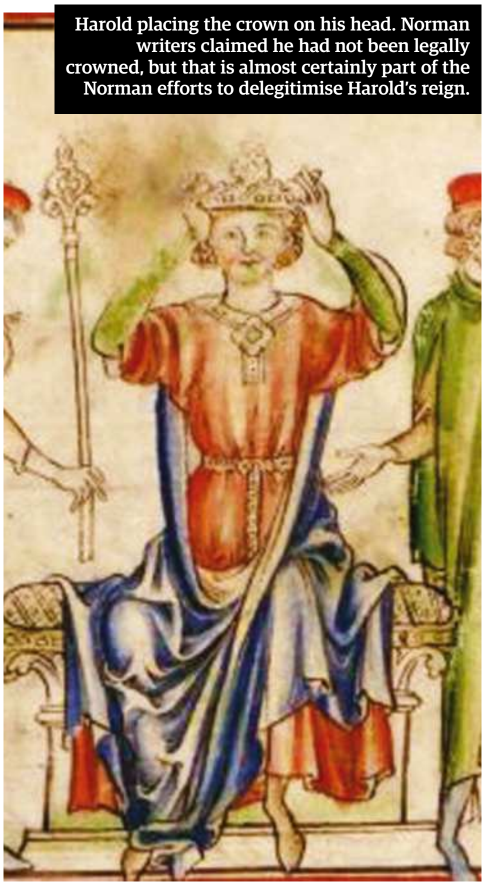
Then, in 1064, the records tell us Harold crossed the Channel and became the guest of Duke William in Normandy.

Why should Harold, now indisputably the most powerful man in the land, let himself fall into the clutches of William? The Norman sources claim that Edward sent Harold to William with the promise that the crown would come to him after Edward's death. But even if the king still wanted this to happen, why should Harold carry such a wish? Edward was in his 60s and he had handed over the running of the kingdom to Harold – he couldn't have made Harold carry such a promise to William even if he'd wanted him to. English chronicles claim it was all a mistake: a fishing trip blown off course by a storm.

But there was reason for Harold to visit William: the duke had of one of his brothers. In the crisis of 1051, Godwin had handed over his youngest son, Wulfnoth, to Edward as a hostage. Some time between then and the Godwins' return in 1052, Wulfnoth had been taken across the Channel to Normandy, and left in the keeping of William. And there he had remained ever since. The most plausible explanation is that Harold set sail with the aim of buying the freedom of his youngest brother.



Harold setting out on his ill-fated journey to redeem his brother. Note the accompanying hawk and dog: hunting was such a major part of the life of the nobility that they took their hunting animals with them when they went abroad



Harold placing the crown on his head. Norman writers claimed he had not been legally crowned, but that is almost certainly part of the Norman efforts to delegitimise Harold's reign.

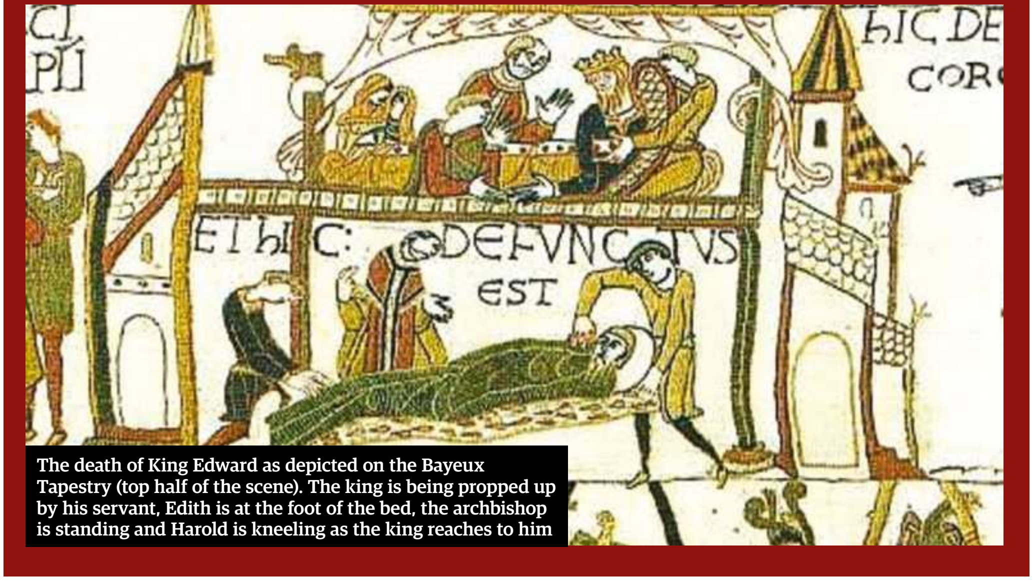
If that was his aim, it failed. Harold returned home without him. But William, for his part, had gained something from Harold: the promise to help William to the throne. For Harold, prisoner first to the Count of Ponthieu and then William's 'guest', there must have seemed little choice but to give his word to gain his freedom. But William seems to have been of a literal turn of mind: an oath, however extracted, was still an oath.

Harold returned home in 1065 to find his brother, Tostig's, earldom under threat. Rebels had united behind the son of the previous earl, intending to depose Tostig and install Morcar as earl of Northumbria. Unhappy with Tostig's governance, the rebels had assembled a great army. Harold went to negotiate with them himself, but the rebels would not accept Tostig back. Returning to the king and his brother, Harold reported their demands, only for Tostig to accuse him of treachery. That seems unlikely: the Godwins' greatest strength had always been their support for each other. But, in this case, Harold was not willing to fight for his brother's cause and on 27 October 1065, Harold told the rebels that they could have their demands: the installation of Morcar as earl of Northumbria and the restitution of their old laws. Four days later, the furious Tostig, with his family and retainers, went into exile. The unity of the Godwin family had been broken, with what would be fatal consequences for them all.

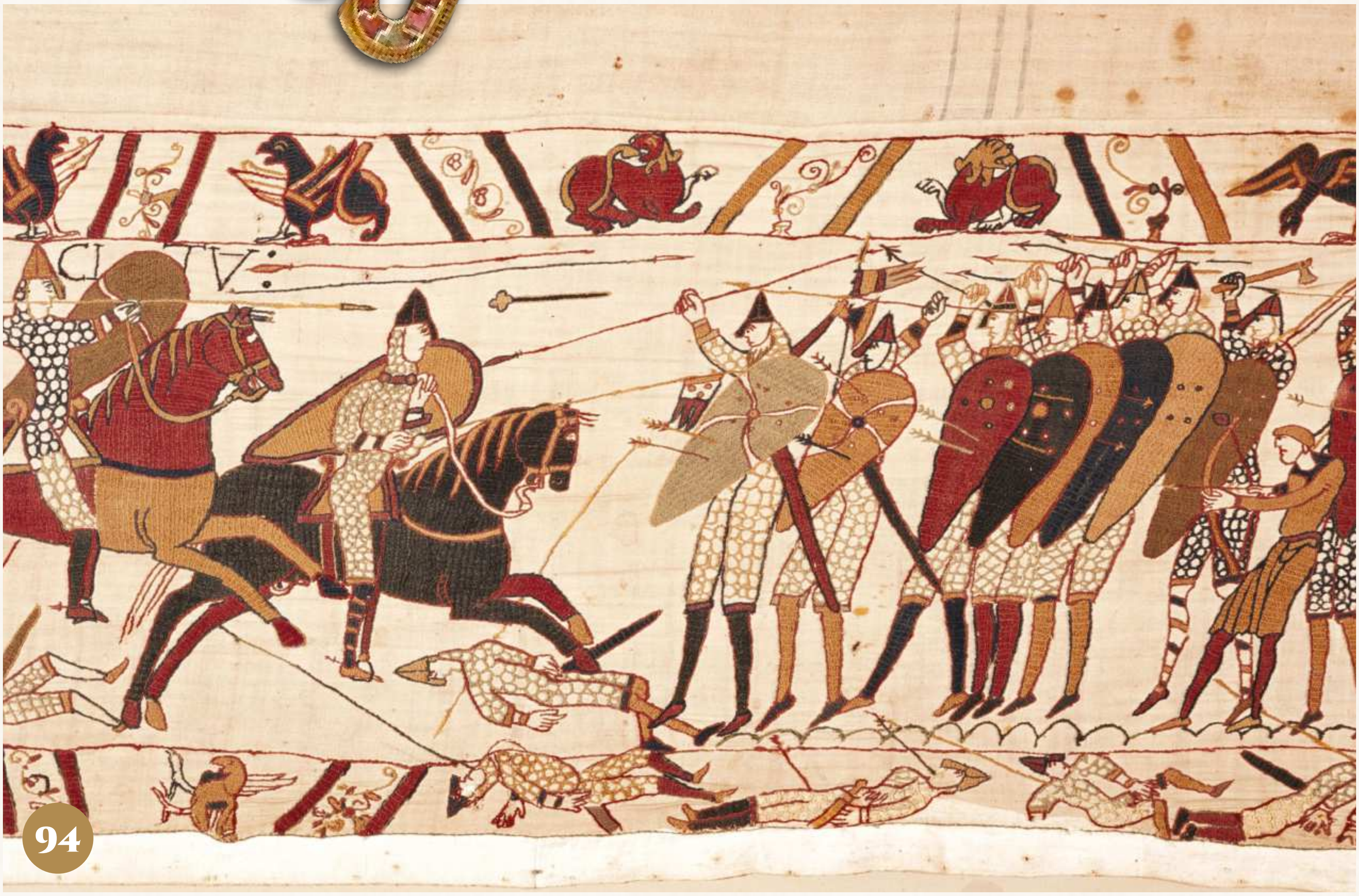
For, at the end of the year, the king fell ill. On 6 January 1066, Edward died. Harold was crowned the same day.

The deathbed of King Edward

Did King Edward give the crown to Harold Godwinson, his most powerful earl, as he lay dying on 6 January 1066? The sources disagree, although most do concur that Edward did give rule of the kingdom into Harold's hands. However, the *Life of Edward*, commissioned by his queen, tells us who was with him on that fateful day: Edith herself, her brother Harold, the archbishop of Canterbury and the steward of the palace. The Bayeux Tapestry reproduces this scene. But what exactly did Edward say? Again, according to the *Vita (Life) of Edward*, the king commended the queen and the kingdom to Harold's protection. Not exactly a ringing endorsement of Harold' – although admittedly the king was dying at the time. But, in England, Edward's wish did not determine his successor; in the end, that was a matter for the magnates of the country. And Harold had spent many years cultivating his contacts with them carefully. So it was no surprise that they chose Harold as monarch, and saw him crowned the same day as Edward died.



The death of King Edward as depicted on the Bayeux Tapestry (top half of the scene). The king is being propped up by his servant, Edith is at the foot of the bed, the archbishop is standing and Harold is kneeling as the king reaches to him



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THE NORMAN CONQUEST

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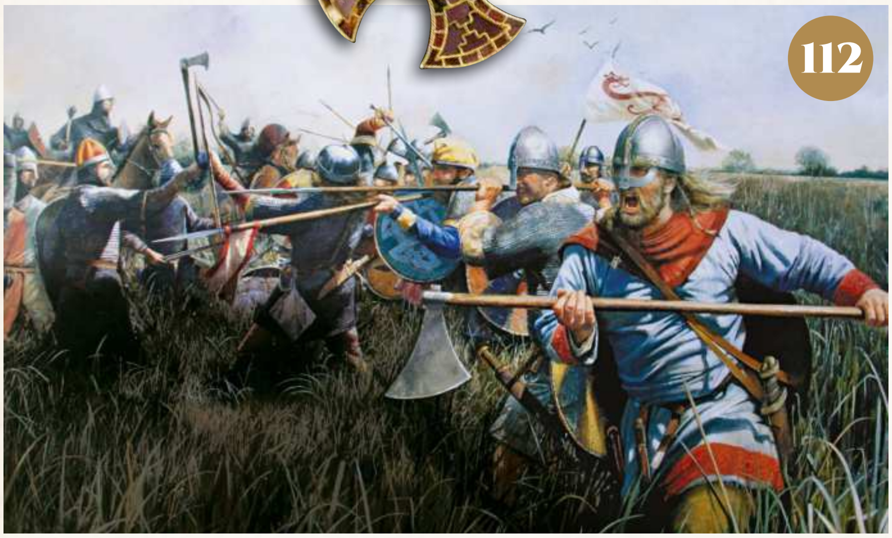
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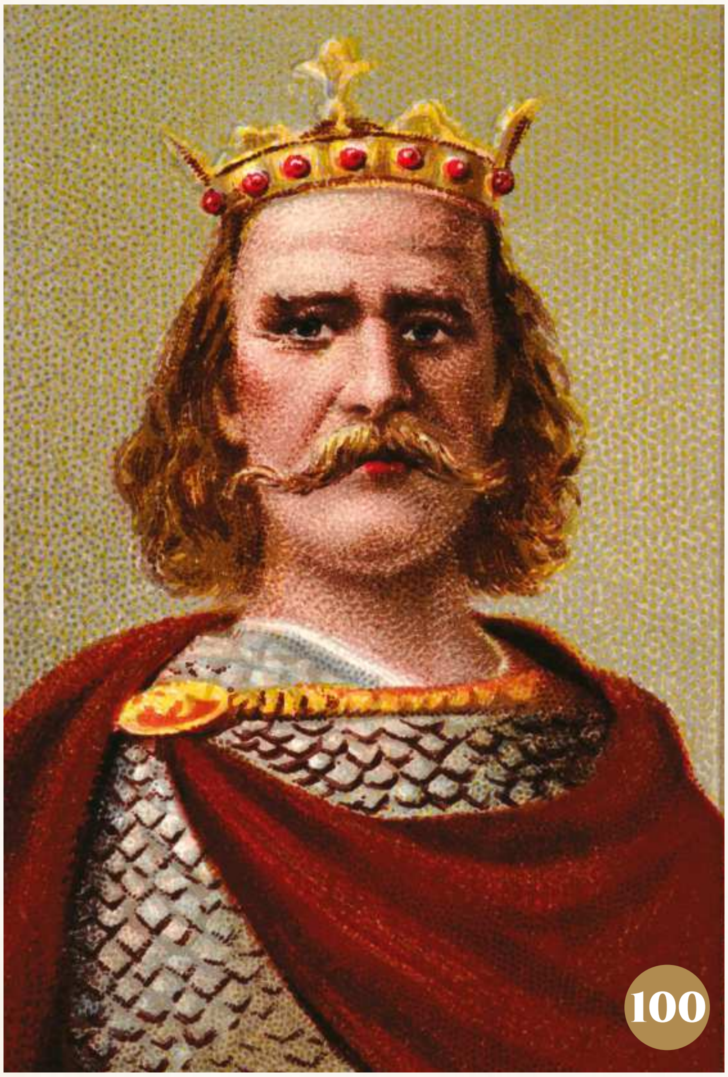
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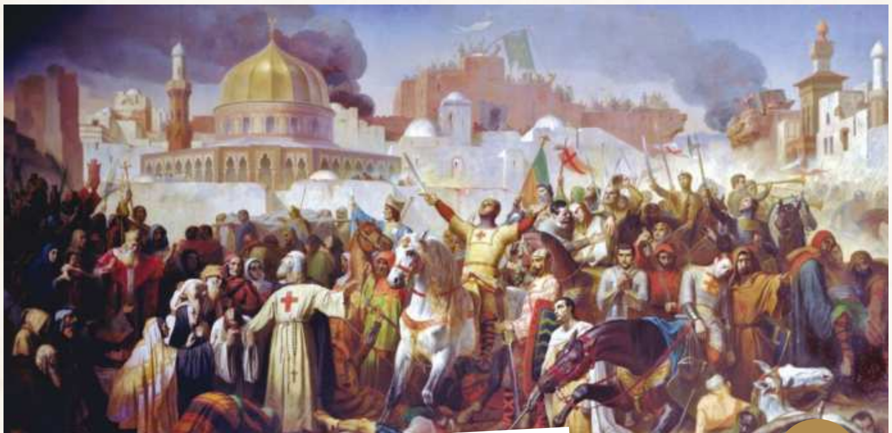
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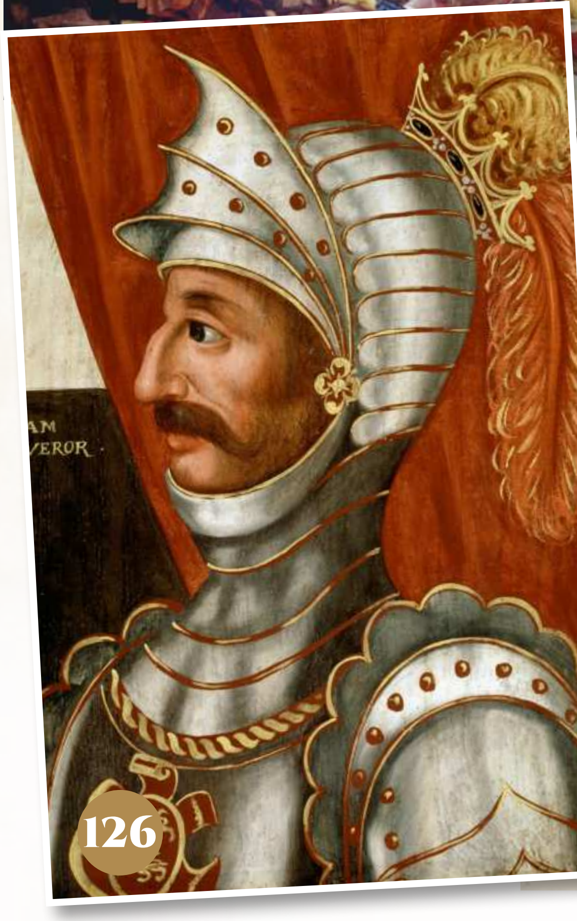
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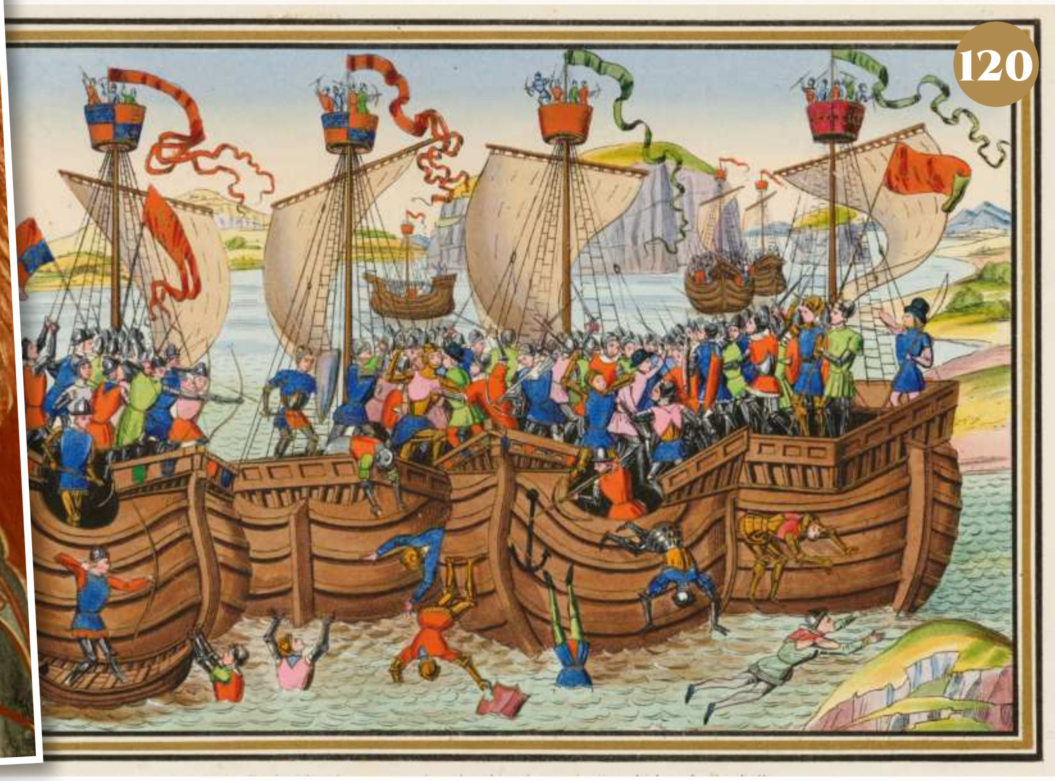
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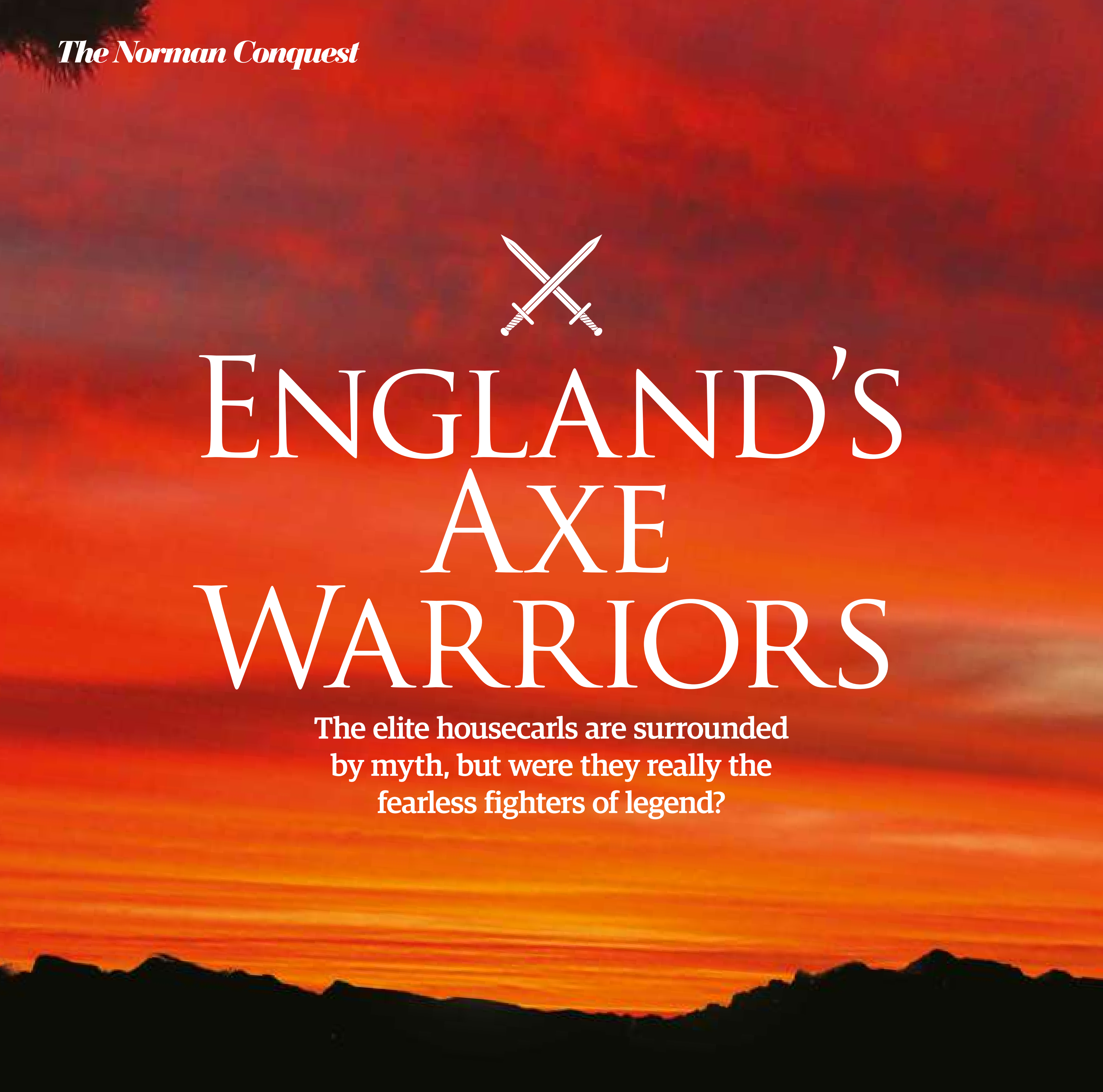


ENGLAND'S AXE WARRIORS

The elite housecarls are surrounded by myth, but were they really the fearless fighters of legend?

Most people know of 1066, but how many people know that England was conquered 50 years earlier, in 1016? The invader then was Cnut – the king now known for vainly trying to turn back the tide. His victory marked the culmination of a century and a half of Viking attacks on England. However, having conquered the country, the Danes left England pretty much as it was. Their main innovation was the introduction of a new class of warrior – the housecarl. When the Normans landed in 1066, the spine of the army that faced William was composed of King Harold's own housecarls. In one of history's great ironies, this meant one set of Viking-derived warriors faced another: the knights of Normandy. The Normans were descendants of Vikings too, and so the battle for England had become a Viking affair.

Leading the battle on the English side, Harold's housecarls stood proud atop Senlac Hill, their shields locked in the warrior wall erected to prevent William's march into England. As the Norman knights charged up the hill, occasionally a brave man would step out of line, wedge his shield into the earth and swing his great two-handed Dane axe. Such was its momentum that it might cut horse and mail-clad rider in two.

These soldiers had already defeated the army of Harald Hardrada of Norway, the most feared Viking king of the time. Although they'd not even had three weeks to recover from the Battle of Stamford Bridge on 25 September, the confidence born of that victory must have sustained Harold and his men on the march south and as they formed their shieldwall. The housecarls were the elite troops of their age. Now, tested again, they would prove it.

Only, as we now know, they failed this final test. Many had fallen at Stamford Bridge, but even with their numbers depleted, they withstood William's men for a long, bloody day at Hastings – when most

early-Medieval battles ended within an hour. Even when King Harold fell, most of his housecarls fought to the death.

To explain the valour and combat strength of these troops, scholars examined the records of the time to find what set them apart from the norm. The majority of Harold's army was composed of the fyrd, the muster of free men called upon to take up arms in service of their king. These were farmers and artisans, armed with spears, wearing leather jerkins and carrying shields. They were strong and brave men, but not elite soldiers. The housecarls were altogether different.

The word, derived from Old Norse and meaning house and man or servant, first appears in English records after Cnut's victory of 1016. They were members of noble households as warriors, and on one occasion tax collectors. However, to explain how such warriors could defeat Harald and come within an hour of dusk in holding back William, scholars looked to other sources. In particular they turned to the Lex Castrensis Sive Curie, contained in the late-12th-century works by the first Danish historians, Sven Aggeson and Saxo Grammaticus.

What wonderful material they found there. According to Aggeson and Grammaticus, Cnut had created a code of rules to regulate his warriors, called Witherlogh in Danish. Having won the throne of England, the king paid off the majority of his army with Danegeld raised from his new subjects. One reason so many people were keen to invade England was the efficiency of its tax gatherers: Cnut raised the astonishing sum of 30,800 kilograms of silver to pay his men, and this after the English had spent the previous two decades paying large sums of Danegeld.

However, Cnut kept the crews of 40 ships to act as a standing army, paid for by a regular tax. He then promulgated a decree that any man wishing to join this brotherhood must show their wealth and worth with gilded axe heads and sword hilts.

In the spirit of getting in with the new boss, as many Angles and Saxons as Danes applied to join Cnut's house men. Finding himself now king of a sea-spanning empire that encompassed England, Denmark, Norway and some of Sweden, Cnut had to find some way of knitting together his household troops. He did so by a law code that required the men to sit in order of precedence in his hall, with the noblest and bravest nearest the king. Infractions were punished by being sent to the end of the table, where the other housecarls might pelt the miscreant with bones and scraps.

A housecarl who offended had to be tried before the whole body of men. Even Cnut was not above the rules: when he killed a housecarl in anger, he was tried before the assembly of men. Although they acquitted him, Cnut fined himself for the crime.

Generally, the punishment for killing another housecarl was exile or death, while treason was, naturally, punishable by death and confiscation of property. In return for their service, Cnut provided his housecarls with board, lodging, entertainment and a generous monthly salary. Housecarls were not bound to service, but according to the Lex Castrensis, they could only leave their post on one day during the year: New Year's Eve. This was also the day when the king gave gifts, thus making it less likely any man would leave his service.

So, according to the Lex Castrensis, Cnut had a standing army whose wages were paid for by regular taxation, and who were bound by a particular and unique law code. This was an extraordinary accretion of royal power and one unparalleled elsewhere in Europe.

Right: Swords with intricate decoration were also a status symbol for the housecarls

But was it true? Remember, the reconstruction of the role and function of housecarls in English society between 1016 and 1066 was based almost completely on documents written in a different country in the late 12th century, more than 100 years, or at least four generations, later.

Scholars believed that these accounts were accurate because they matched two incidents from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which apparently described housecarls tried before their own assembly and sentenced according to the law code in the Lex Castrensis. The whole argument for reading a late-12th-century document back to the early 11th century rests upon these two entries in the *Chronicle* – and the correct translation of just three words. But now it seems those words – here, niðing and stefn – were not used in the precise sense demanded by this argument but had become generalised in the usage of the time.

Highly decorated metal helmets were a mark of a warrior's elite status

The Lex Castrensis was composed in 12th-century Denmark as the king there was attempting to increase his control over contemporary housecarls, who really were a political and military elite at the time. How much easier would it be to control these housecarls if it could be proved that their law code went back to Cnut the Great himself. Therefore, we can answer cui bono: who would benefit the most from this historical interpolation?

Recent scholarship has debunked the old idea of the housecarls as a discrete, standing army, bound by its own set of laws and acting as the king's troubleshooters. So, who were the men that fought alongside Harold through his three battles of 1066?

> "A housecarl who offended had to be tried before the whole body of men. Even Cnut was not above the rules"

Words to fight by

The ideals that moved Anglo-Saxon housecarls to serve – to the death if required

Loyalty

Loyalty was the keystone virtue for Anglo-Saxon warriors – indeed, for the whole of Anglo-Saxon society. A housecarl was bound by oaths of loyalty to his lord. It was these oaths that fired his service and gave him the moral courage to fight on, even to death, should his lord fall. This loyalty is summed up in the Old English poem *The Battle of Maldon*. With their lord struck down by Vikings, one of the remaining men rallied the rest with the words: "Thought must be the harder, heart the keener/Spirit shall be more – as our might lessens." Did these words run through the minds of Harold's housecarls as they fought to the end beside their king?

Courage

Loyalty wasn't worth much without courage – at least not in 11th-century England. The courage celebrated in poems such as *Beowulf* was tinged with the fatalism inherent in old Anglo-Saxon paganism, and then infused with Christian hope. The courage of the loyal housecarl was founded on the twin beliefs that defeat was no refutation and that, for the faithful warrior, there was eternal reward.

Glory

Glory was the currency of the early-Medieval warrior's life. A housecarl was bound to his lord by bonds of obligation and trust, but the glory won in battle was what made a man's name and won him great renown.

Generosity

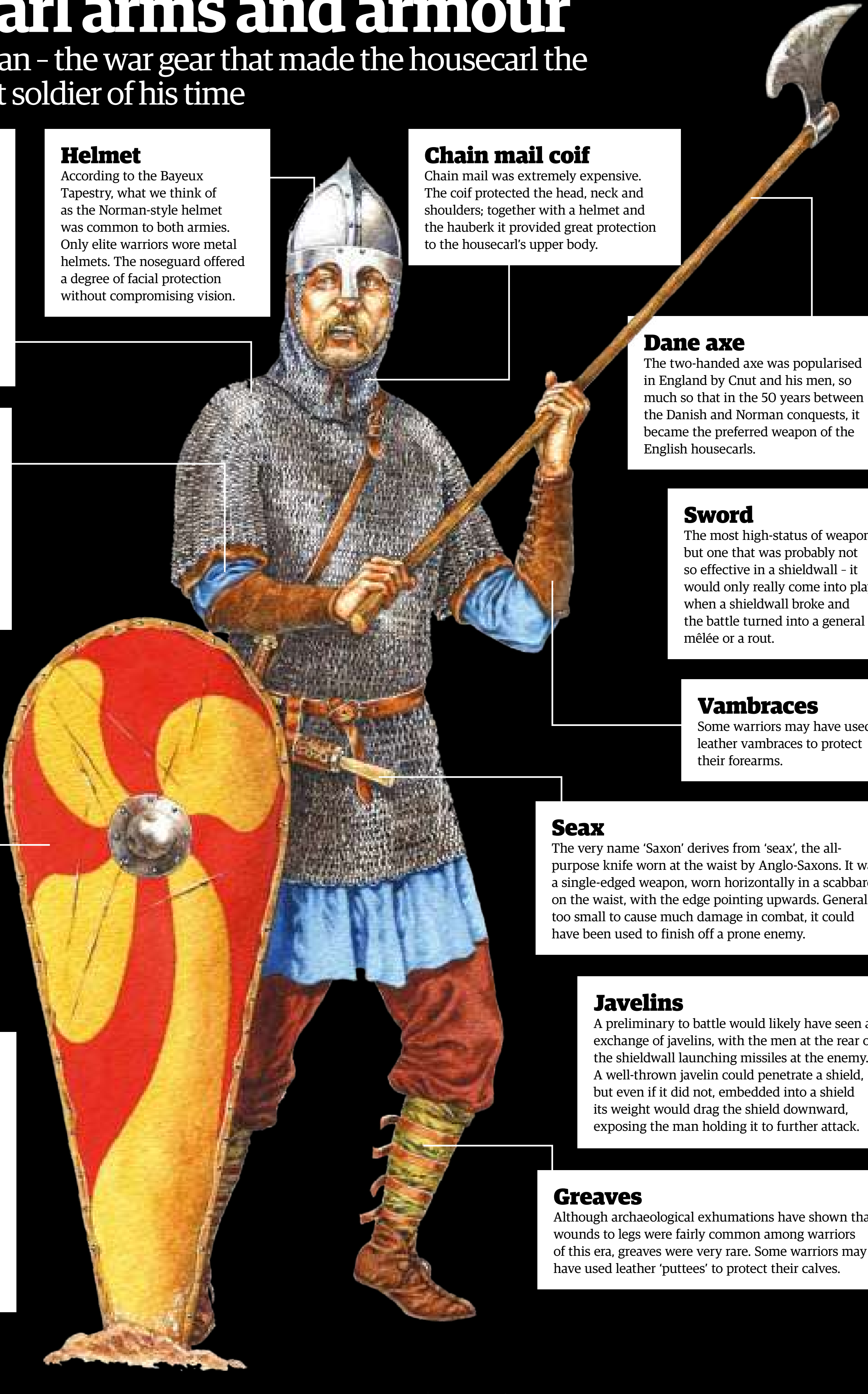
A king cemented the loyalty of his warriors – and indeed his entire kingdom – by the giving of gifts. After a successful battle, the ideal Anglo-Saxon king shared out the booty to his warriors, so much so that 'ring-giver' is a synonym for king in Anglo-Saxon poetry. This had the additional effect, though, of institutionalising warfare – the best, and sometimes singular way to acquire more gifts was to win them in battle.

Prestige

For all Anglo-Saxons, but particularly the warriors, words were vital. In what was still largely an oral culture, whose values were celebrated by the king's poet, or scop, words and stories bound a people to their origin, celebrated bravery in battle and the generosity of kings, and provided, through riddles and songs, entertainment through the long evenings. Orations and insults were an important part of the preliminaries to battle, used to bolster the courage of fellows and to sow uncertainty among the enemy.

Housecarl arms and armour

Arms and the man – the war gear that made the housecarl the most-feared foot soldier of his time



Chain mail hauberk
Chain mail was one of the greatest gifts a housecarl might receive from his lord. If a mail-clad warrior fell in battle, there would be a great struggle to strip the armour from the body. Mail was very effective protection against slashes or thrusts from swords or spears, although clubs could cause trauma without penetrating the armour.

Helmet
According to the Bayeux Tapestry, what we think of as the Norman-style helmet was common to both armies. Only elite warriors wore metal helmets. The noseguard offered a degree of facial protection without compromising vision.

Chain mail coif
Chain mail was extremely expensive. The coif protected the head, neck and shoulders; together with a helmet and the hauberk it provided great protection to the housecarl's upper body.

Dane axe
The two-handed axe was popularised in England by Cnut and his men, so much so that in the 50 years between the Danish and Norman conquests, it became the preferred weapon of the English housecarls.

Gambeson
Housecarls wore a padded, quilted jacket under the mail. This cushioned against blows from blunt weapons such as maces and warhammers, as well as providing a further layer of protection against edged weapons. Poorer warriors would have relied on just this padded jacket for defence.

Sword
The most high-status of weapons but one that was probably not so effective in a shieldwall – it would only really come into play when a shieldwall broke and the battle turned into a general mêlée or a rout.

Vambraces
Some warriors may have used leather vambraces to protect their forearms.

Shield
The typical Anglo-Saxon shield was round, with a central boss, and made of lime, alder or poplar – light woods that are resistant to splitting. By the 11th century, the teardrop-shaped shield had also become widespread, providing greater whole body protection and, because it could more easily be jammed into the ground, it allowed housecarls to stand behind it while using the two-handed Dane axe.

Seax
The very name 'Saxon' derives from 'seax', the all-purpose knife worn at the waist by Anglo-Saxons. It was a single-edged weapon, worn horizontally in a scabbard on the waist, with the edge pointing upwards. Generally too small to cause much damage in combat, it could have been used to finish off a prone enemy.

Javelins
A preliminary to battle would likely have seen an exchange of javelins, with the men at the rear of the shieldwall launching missiles at the enemy. A well-thrown javelin could penetrate a shield, but even if it did not, embedded into a shield its weight would drag the shield downward, exposing the man holding it to further attack.

Spear
The ubiquitous weapon of the era. The mark of a free man was being allowed to carry a spear – slaves could not. Spears were the ideal weapon in the shieldwall, as they kept the enemy at distance while allowing the warrior to thrust at exposed areas. Some spears had small projections, or wings, that were used to hook and pull an enemy's shield out of position. Spears were usually used over arm, aiming at the enemy's face.

Greaves
Although archaeological exhumations have shown that wounds to legs were fairly common among warriors of this era, greaves were very rare. Some warriors may have used leather 'puttees' to protect their calves.

Well, one thing is for sure: they had axes. The great two-handed Dane axes were their characteristic weapon and something that set them apart from the thegns of the pre-Cnut era. But, in most other ways, they were indistinguishable from the thegns who had long served the Anglo-Saxon kings.

Thegns had started out as warriors, members of the warbands that the first generations of Anglo-Saxon kings gathered around them, held to service by the gift-giving of the king. As time passed, the duties of the thegn broadened. As reward for service, a thegn would be gifted land, where he acted as the king's representative, but this land returned to the king upon the thegn's death. However, with the rise of monasteries, this reversion of land became untenable: institutions needed to own their land in perpetuity so that they could adequately plan for the future. So, from Offa onwards, the Anglo-Saxon kings developed the idea of bookland, where ownership of land was inscribed in deeds into books of record.

The idea, once developed, swiftly proved irresistible to the Anglo-Saxon warrior aristocracy, as it meant that a thegn could pass on land to his children, and hold that land within his family through the generations.

With this development, the qualification for the rank of thegn shifted towards property, so that by the time of Æthelred, a ceorl could ascend to the rank of thegn if he could assemble sufficient property, including five hides of land, a church, a kitchen and bell house, as well as duties in the king's hall. Even a merchant could become a thegn if he were able to fund three trading trips abroad. This was reflected in the language. Old English 'rice' ('rich' in modern English), which before had meant a powerful man, came to mean a wealthy man.

With increasing access to the rank of thegn, there grew increasing divisions within it, with those attending upon the king most highly ranked. Documents of the time sometimes refer to the same man as "cynges huskarl" and "minister regis". The latter term ('minister to the king') indicates that housecarls, and particularly those attached to the king's household, had other duties apart from warfare – just as well, really, since even a society as chronically violent as 11th-century England was not permanently fighting.

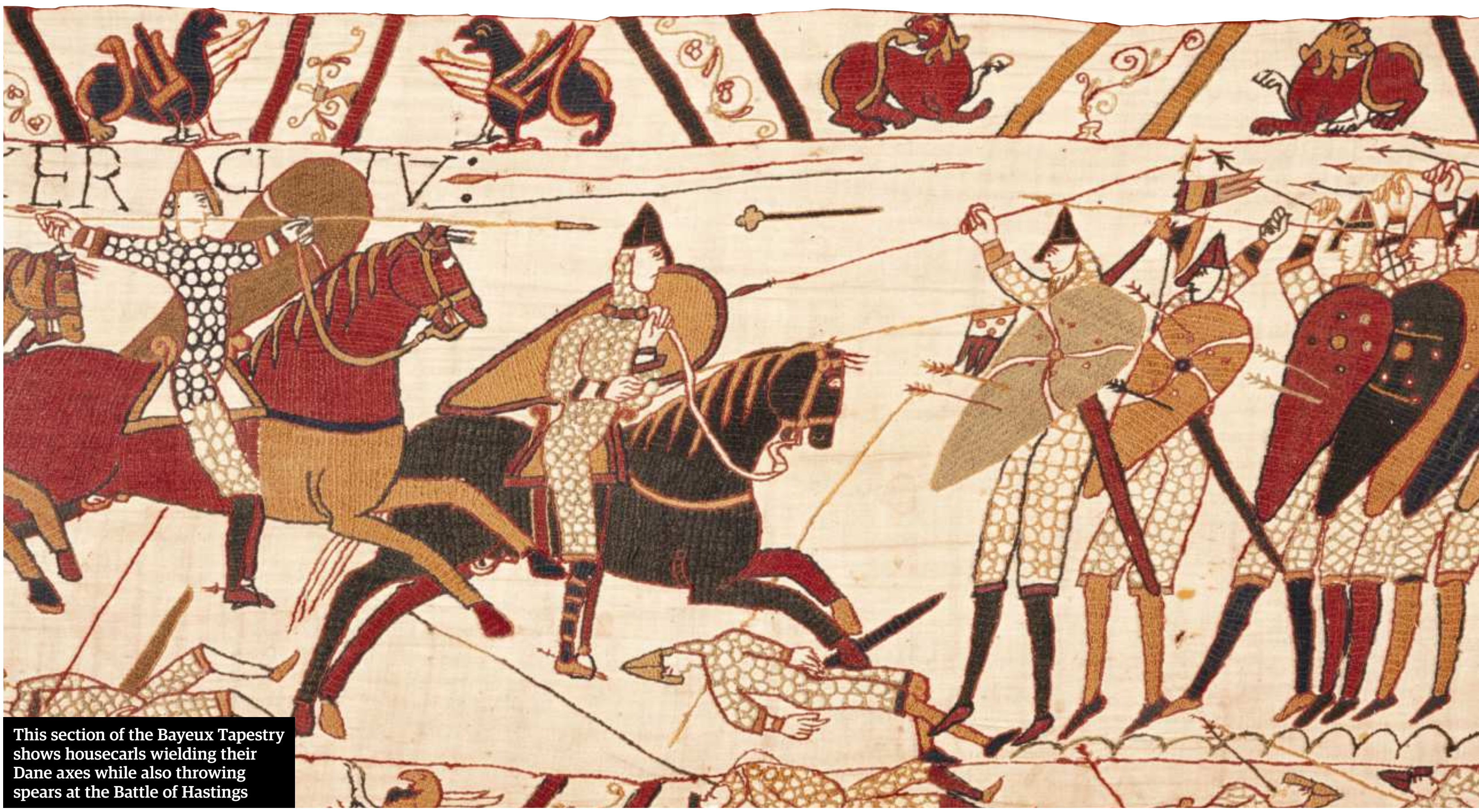
One of the most vivid examples we have of the further duties of the housecarl comes from the brief reign of Harthacnut, Cnut's son. Not taking any chances on the supporters of the previous king, his late half-brother Harold Harefoot, Harthacnut had arrived on English shores with a fleet of 62 ships. Although he received the throne without demur, Harthacnut still had to pay off his men and, like his father, he did so by taxing the people he was going to reign over. Among the tax gatherers Harthacnut sent around the kingdom were his own housecarls, two of which were sent to Worcester where they proceeded to annoy the local populace so much that they dispatched the tax gatherers.

An enraged Harthacnut ordered the rest of his housecarls to Worcester with the command to ravage and burn the city, and to kill all the men. Luckily for the people of Worcester, they received warning and almost all fled with their lives. The housecarls looted for five days and then burned the city down.

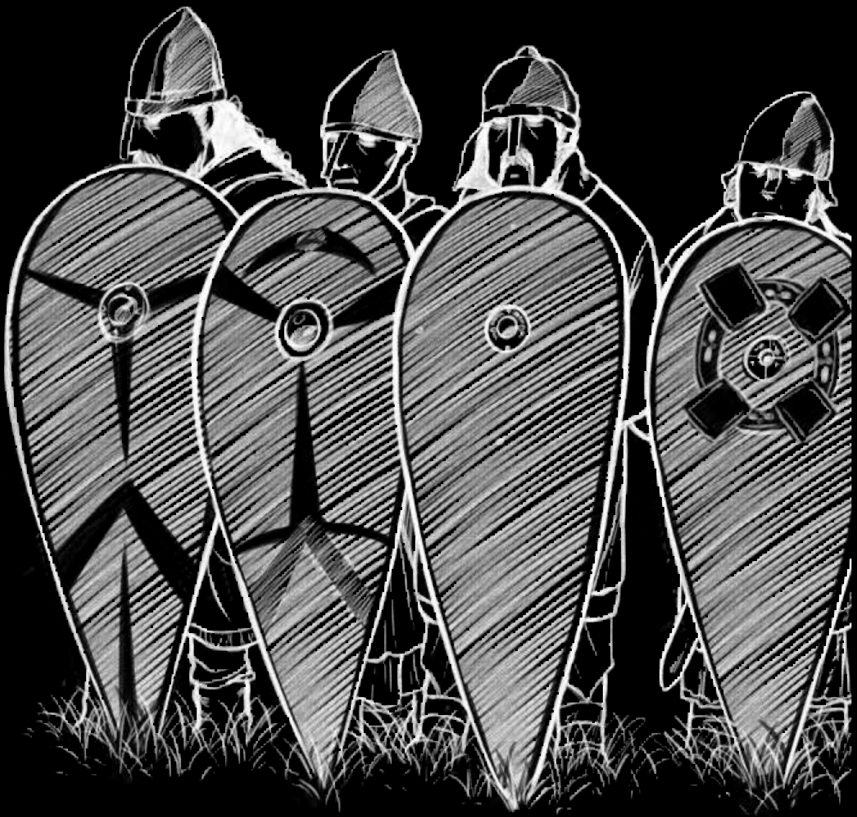
As members of royal or noble households, housecarls were paid a wage, but they were not mercenaries. A mercenary is a soldier who fights for whoever will pay the price. In distinction, a housecarl served his lord, for which service he received a wage. There was no contradiction between receiving a wage and loyalty unto death.

This wage, and the gifts given by their lord, enabled those housecarls who were not landholders to pay for their war gear. Relatively few housecarls seem to have held land – the main source of wealth at the time – so they must have depended on payment, gift giving and trophy taking after battles or contests to build and maintain their war gear. Not surprisingly, housecarls lavished money upon their equipment.

> "An enraged Harthacnut ordered the rest of his housecarls to Worcester with the command to ravage and burn the city"



This section of the Bayeux Tapestry shows housecarls wielding their Dane axes while also throwing spears at the Battle of Hastings



The shieldwall was one of the staple Anglo-Saxon tactics

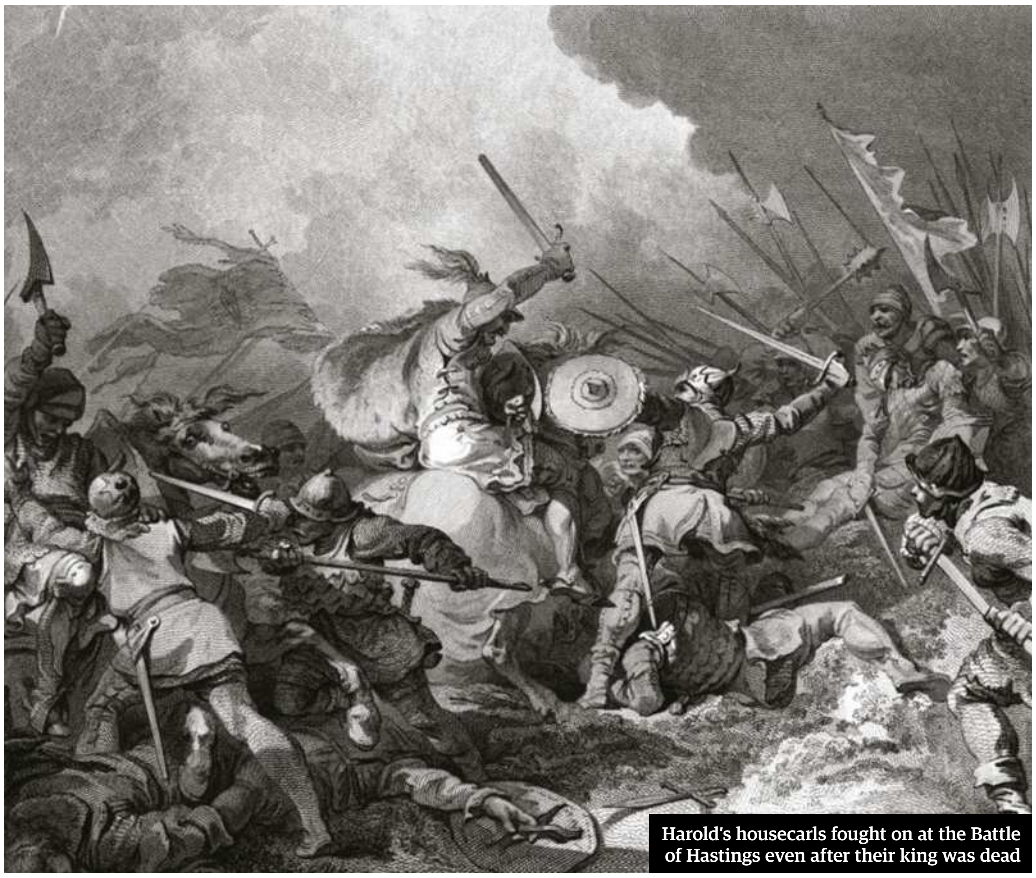
Form ranks

The first order of business for housecarls was fighting – but how did they fight and with what weapons?

What set the housecarls of late Anglo-Saxon England apart from their warrior predecessors was their weapon of choice – the Dane axe – and their increasing use of the teardrop-shaped 'Norman' shield. As with all Anglo-Saxon warriors, they fought on foot, although as high-status warriors they rode to battle, forming up as the front rank of the shield wall and the personal bodyguard of the king and earls.

The Dane axe was a formidable weapon. Its haft, usually between three and four feet long (although display weapons had longer hafts), was held in both hands. The axe head was light and forged to be thin, with a reinforced, carbon-steel cutting edge. As wielding the Dane axe required both hands, the housecarl had to step out from the line of the shieldwall. This was where the shift to 'Norman' shields makes sense, as the shield could be planted in the earth in front of the housecarl, providing some protection against arrows. With both arms free, the housecarl could build momentum by swinging the Dane axe in circles. With so much stored energy, an enemy coming within striking distance ran the risk of being cut in two. The Bayeux Tapestry shows a housecarl cutting the head of a Norman knight's horse in half: in the battle itself, that housecarl could probably have cut right through the knight riding the horse as well.

> "The great two-handed Dane axes were their characteristic weapon"



Harold's housecarls fought on at the Battle of Hastings even after their king was dead

Particularly for those employed in the household of the king or his great earls, the more resplendent the war gear, the higher the status of the wearer. When it came to the chaos and blood of the shieldwall, good war gear would become, quite literally, a matter of life and death.

We can say that recent scholarship indicates that the old idea of housecarls as a discrete body of men, bound by their own law code and acting as the king's standing army, is false. After Cnut's conquest, the terms 'housecarl' and 'thegn' seem to have been used interchangeably, with the only significant difference being that housecarls were originally more likely to be Danish.

As high-status warriors, they were still called upon to serve king and lord, and, by virtue of their training and weapons, they did form an elite group of infantry. As the men of Harold's household stood on Senlac Hill, fingering the shafts of their Dane axes, they must have been confident in their ability to see off this new pretender to the crown.

We know they failed, but of those who survived, many went into exile and migrated east to the court of the last Romans, the emperors of Byzantium. In the aftermath of Hastings, English housecarls went on to form the backbone of the emperor's Varangian Guard, which became known as an Anglo-Saxon force. From the ends of the earth, the last housecarls finished their service at the centre of the world, serving the last emperors – a fitting swan song.

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CLASH OF CROWNS

1066

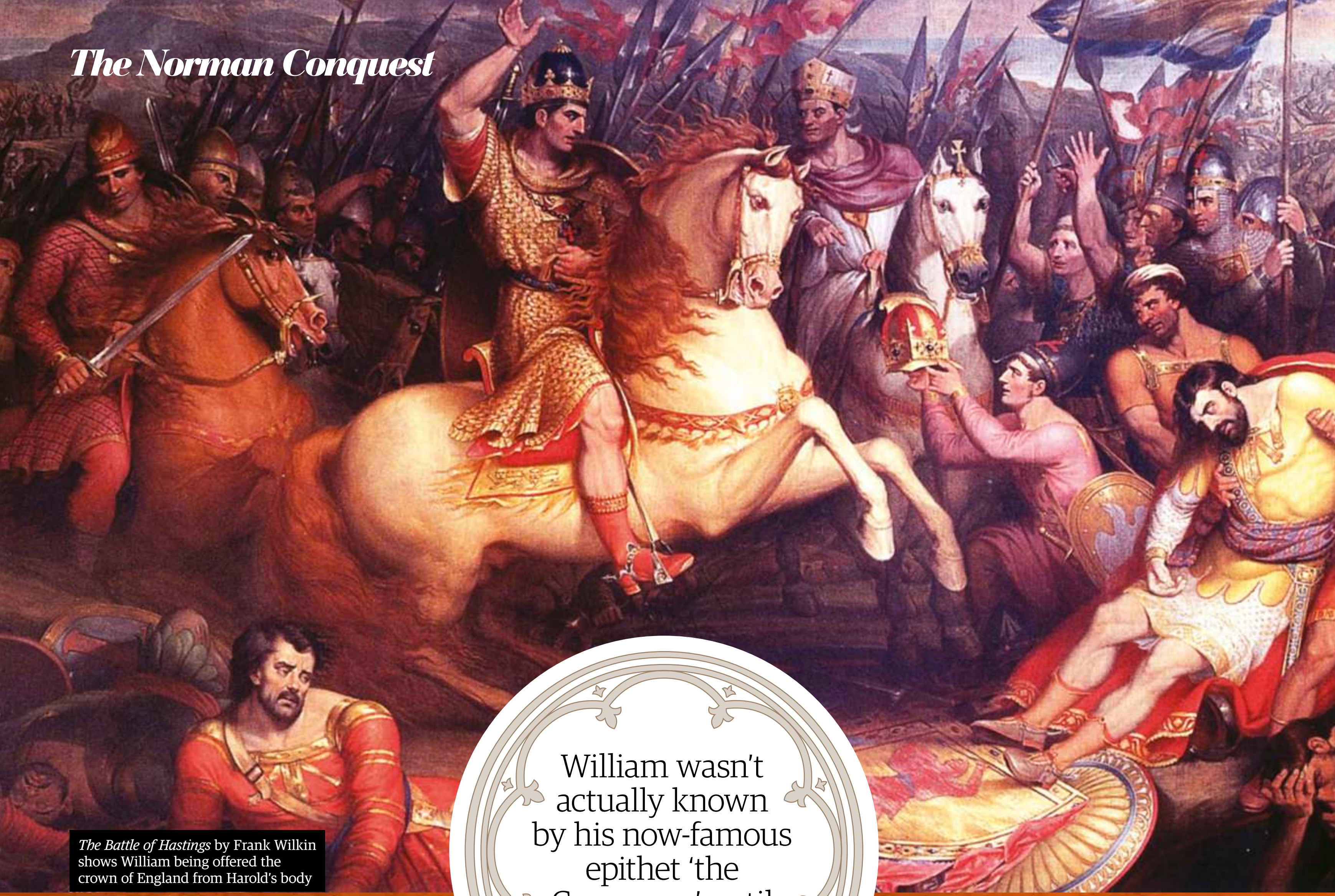
When three kings rose to claim Edward the Confessor's crown, England's fate would be decided with steel and blood

Harold Godwinson's army was exhausted. Just weeks ago they had claimed victory against a Nordic invasion in a long, brutal battle at Stamford Bridge. They had marched approximately 400 kilometres with their weapons, gear and armour and it was during this march that Harold had received news of William of Normandy's landing on the shore of Pevensey. With a great deal of his men still in the north, Harold had no choice but to push onwards to meet the infamous Norman Bastard in combat.

As Harold stood on the hill overlooking what is today the town of Battle, near Hastings, with his banners wafting in the morning breeze, he observed his army - they were wearied, sick, and many were still nursing wounds from Stamford Bridge. But there was nothing he could do - these were the men with whom England's fate rested, for William was coming for his crown whether he was ready or not.

Edward the Confessor (so-called for his piety) had reigned for 23 years - fairly long for an Anglo-Saxon monarch - but he had not borne any heirs. In fact, Edward had turned this to his advantage. With so many ambitious nobles jostling for position, he used the inheritance of his kingdom as a diplomatic tool, and one that, he was likely aware, he would not personally feel the repercussions of. However, this was all fated to come to a head: towards the end of 1065, Edward became severely ill and fell into a coma. He briefly regained consciousness long enough to place his widow and his kingdom under the protection of his brother-in-law, Harold Godwinson, before passing away.

There is much debate over what exactly Edward meant by 'protection', and whether he was actually bestowing Harold his kingdom or just employing him to help the next man who would rule it. However, these arguments are, on the whole, irrelevant. Although he was free to nominate a man of his choosing, it wasn't an Anglo-Saxon king's right to decide who would be his successor; that responsibility instead fell to the Witenaġemot, the king's council of advisers. The Witenaġemot had already begun to debate who would be the right man for the job before Edward's death. They decreed that he needed to be English, of good character and of royal blood - and luckily for Harold, he ticked all these boxes.



The Battle of Hastings by Frank Wilkin shows William being offered the crown of England from Harold's body

William wasn't actually known by his now-famous epithet 'the Conqueror' until at least the 1120s

Despite a tumultuous family history, Harold had steadfastly and loyally served Edward for years, eventually becoming a trusted adviser. As earl of Wessex, he was already one of the most powerful men in the country, and he had proved himself multiple times in battle. Edward had also married Harold's sister and his family had ties with Cnut the Great. Perhaps most importantly, Harold held esteem with the elite of English society - he was well liked and reliable. In fact, Harold's worthiness was so unanimously agreed by the Witenaġemot that no other names were even suggested. William and other contenders would later claim that Harold had stolen the throne, even that he had murdered Edward to do it, but Harold didn't 'grab' the kingdom - he was gifted it.

Harold seemed to be the perfect king: he was tall, eloquent and a skilled soldier; however, his reign would be one of the most turbulent and infamous in English history. Someone else had his gaze fixed on Edward's throne, and when Harold was crowned, William, Duke of Normandy, was furious. William fervently believed England was his by birthright as he and Edward were distant cousins. He also claimed that some years earlier Edward had stated that he was his successor, and this message had been carried to him by none other than Harold Godwinson himself.

The legitimacy of this story is in some dispute - certainly Edward likely promised the kingdom to a host of nobles throughout his reign, but William did not seem to understand that England was not Edward's to give. No other action in Edward's reign indicates that he had chosen William to be his heir. The duke, however, was convinced that the kingdom was his, and set his sights on usurping the ambitious upstart, Harold Godwinson. He immediately made plans to invade England, building a fleet of around 700 ships to carry his army across the channel.

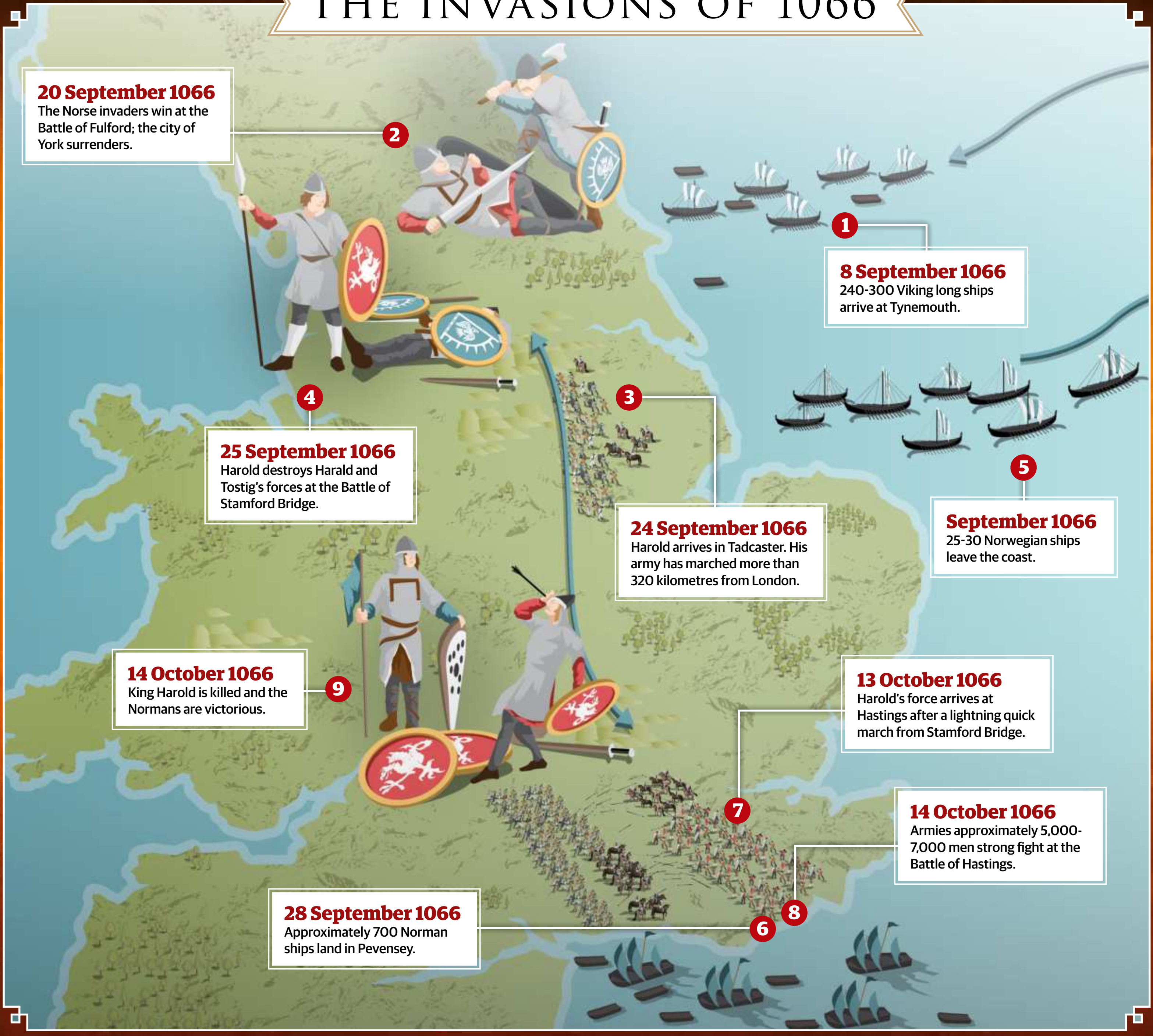
Initially William struggled to gain support for his invasion, but when he revealed that Harold had apparently sworn upon sacred relics that he would support William's claim, the Church became involved, and the finances and nobles that it provided swelled William's pockets and his army. Harold, well aware of the fiery duke's intentions, assembled his army on the Isle of Wight. However, William did not come. Unfavourable winds halted the would-be conqueror's ships and, with his provisions running low, Harold disbanded his army and returned to London.

Harold probably knew that William would be coming sooner rather than later, but he had another issue to deal with - sibling rivalry. On the same day as Harold's return to London, Harald Hardrada of Norway, also known as the last great Viking king, landed his fleet of longships on the mouth of the Tyne and joined up with Tostig Godwinson, Harold's younger brother.

Tostig had previously ruled the kingdom of Northumbria, an earldom stretching from the Humber to the Tweed, but his brutal and heavy-handed tendencies had caused him to grow increasingly unpopular with his subjects. In 1065, the thegns of York occupied the city, killed Tostig's officials and outlawed the man himself. The rebels were so furious with Tostig that they demanded Edward exile him. However, it wasn't the king who met with them, but his loyal advisor Harold. Using his strong influence, Harold had Tostig officially outlawed, but the fiery younger brother was not one to take things lying down. At a meeting of the king and his council, he intervened and publicly accused Harold of conspiring against him. Harold, already aware of the dire state of England at the time, and the imminent threat of William, exiled his own brother.

It is likely that Harold took the action he did against his own kin to ensure peace and loyalty in the north - an impossibility with Tostig in charge - but his brother resented him for it. As he fled England and took refuge in Flanders, Tostig let fantasies of vengeance consume him and began to plot his return. He knew he didn't have enough power alone to topple his older brother, so he set

THE INVASIONS OF 1066



8 September 1066
240-300 Viking long ships arrive at Tynemouth.

20 September 1066
The Norse invaders win at the Battle of Fulford; the city of York surrenders.

24 September 1066
Harold arrives in Tadcaster. His army has marched more than 320 kilometres from London.

25 September 1066
Harold destroys Harald and Tostig's forces at the Battle of Stamford Bridge.

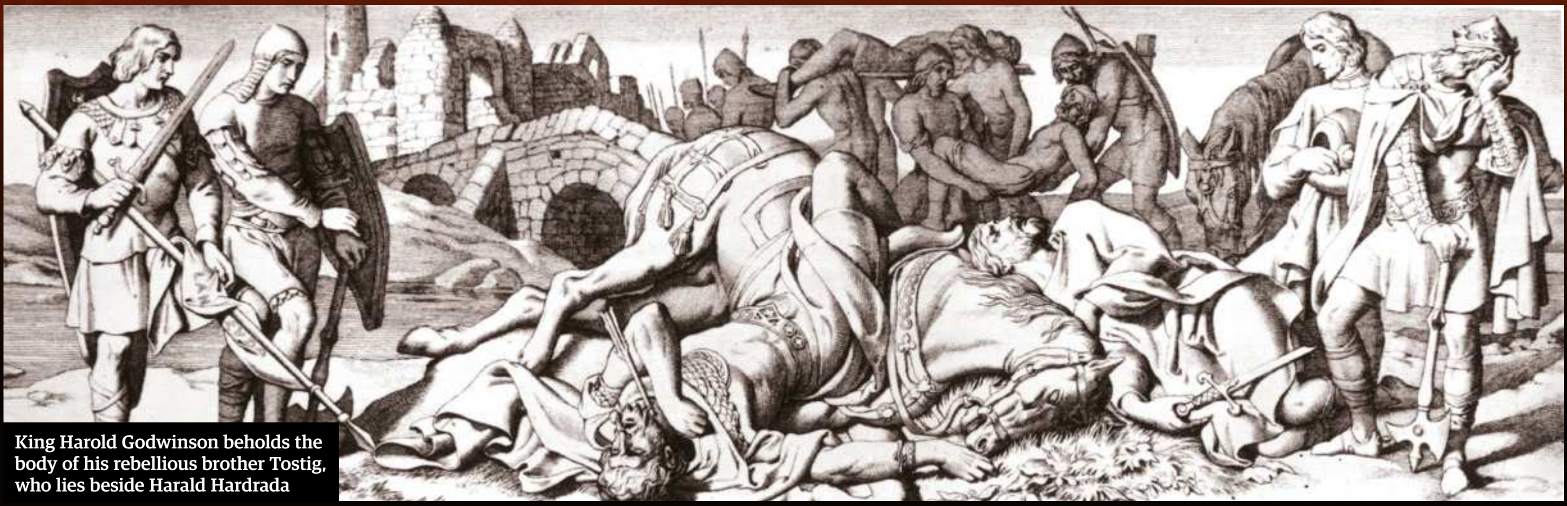
September 1066
25-30 Norwegian ships leave the coast.

28 September 1066
Approximately 700 Norman ships land in Pevensey.

13 October 1066
Harold's force arrives at Hastings after a lightning quick march from Stamford Bridge.

14 October 1066
Armies approximately 5,000-7,000 men strong fight at the Battle of Hastings.

14 October 1066
King Harold is killed and the Normans are victorious.



King Harold Godwinson beholds the body of his rebellious brother Tostig, who lies beside Harald Hardrada about making powerful alliances; he even sought a partnership with William before finally striking gold with King Harald III of Norway.

Hardrada's claim to the throne was even looser than William's. England had previously been ruled by the king of Denmark, Harthacnut, who made an agreement with Magnus, the king of Norway, that if one of them died without an heir, the other would inherit his throne. Harthacnut died childless, so Magnus took the crown of Denmark. However, Edward the Confessor was crowned king of England in his absence. Harald was Magnus' uncle and his co-king, so believed England belonged to him. The idea that his kingdom was being ruled by the son of one of Edward's advisers was outrageous for the Nordic monarch, and he set his sights on expanding his territories.

Whether Hardrada made an agreement with Tostig before setting sail or not is unknown, but either way Hardrada departed in August and met up with Tostig on 8 September. It was clear that Tostig needed Hardrada's help with the invasion - he had just a mere 12 ships to Hardrada's 240 minimum. Hardrada spent some time sacking and burning coastal villages, but he then set his sights on York, Tostig's old stomping ground. Hardrada had the men and Tostig knew the lay of the land better than anyone, so together they made an alarming foe to be reckoned with.

The two men who would have to face this united force were Edwin and Morcar, the ealdormen of Mercia and Northumbria. They knew of Tostig and Hardrada's advances through their lands and had already gathered their forces, approximately 5,000 strong, to take down the invaders in what they expected to be a straightforward battle. The armies met at Fulford, on the outskirts of York.

The scene of the clash was wet and sodden marshland. The English positioned themselves with the River Ouse on their right flank and the swampy area on their left, a tactic that relied on both flanks holding their own against the invaders. Hardrada, meanwhile, had to think quickly - the English army had confronted him before he could assemble all his men, and many of them were hours away, so he had to be cunning with his troop deployment. He placed his less experienced troops to the right and kept his best troops with him on the riverbank. The English had caught wind of Harald's delays and so struck quickly. They charged forward against the Norwegian line and, immediately overwhelmed, the Nordics were pushed all the way back to the marshland's treacherous terrain.

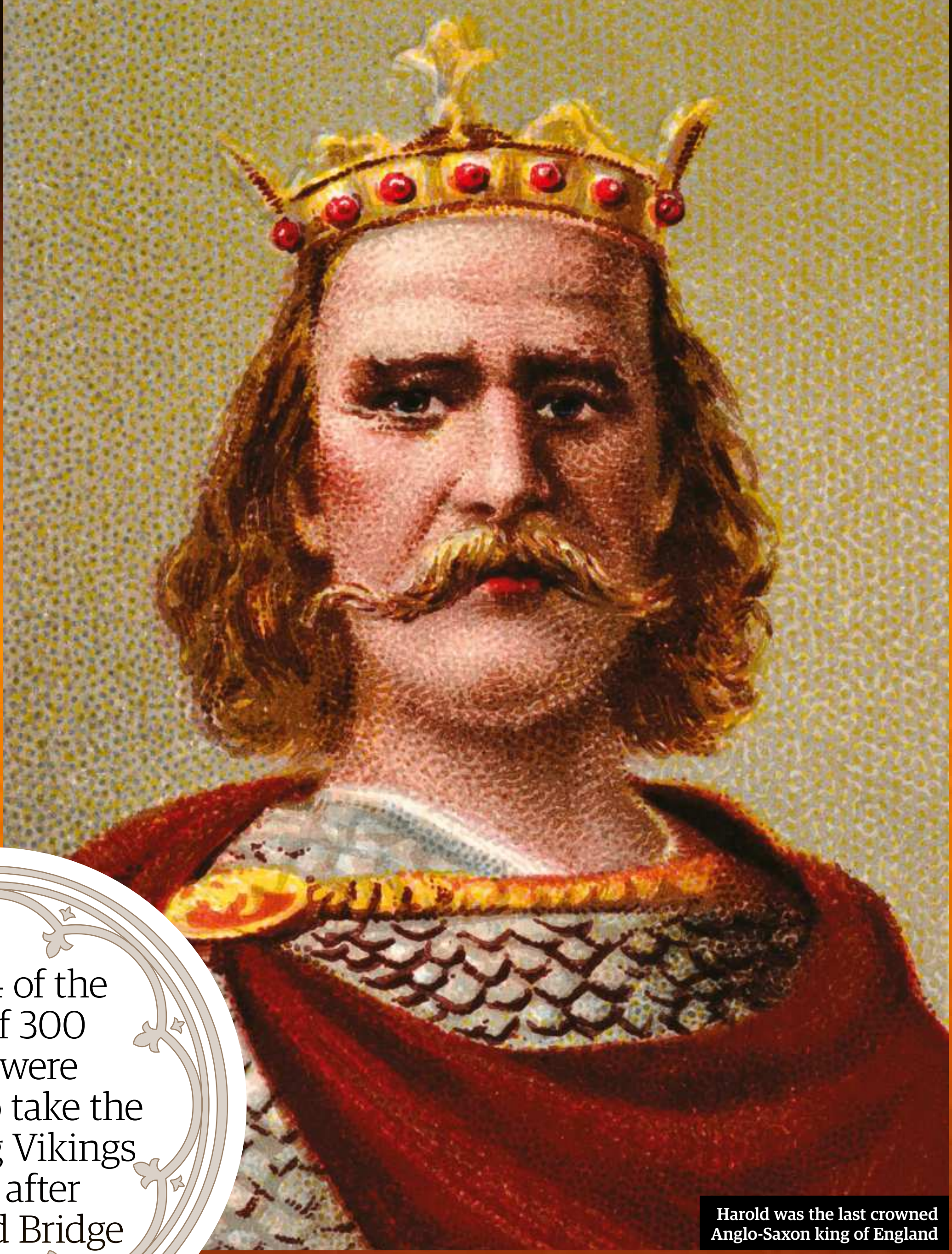
Hardrada then saw his chance. As the English advanced, he sent the bulk of his troops to sweep around them in a pincer movement, trapping them against the ditch and separating them from the other English flank. As more Norwegians arrived, they opened up a third front against the Anglo-Saxons. The combat in the marshland was brutal and ferocious, with both armies fighting frantically through the thick, sludgy mud. However, the English were now outnumbered by the Norse men, many of them were unable to escape the ditch and those that managed to climb out fled for their lives. Eventually there were so many English bodies strewn across the ground that the invaders could advance without getting their feet wet.

With such a definite defeat, York was promptly surrendered to Hardrada and Tostig with the promise that they would not force entry. This was accepted, perhaps because the duo did not wish to subject their new capital to looting and pillaging. Instead they arranged that various hostages would be handed over at Stamford Bridge, some 11 kilometres away, which is where the two men chose to retire. The battle at Fulford would not only be Hardrada's last victory, but it would be the last time a largely Scandinavian army would defeat the English.

Little did the victorious invaders know, Harold and his men had been marching day and night from London. Despite the imminent threat of an invasion by William, Harold was so determined to repel the invaders that he and his army achieved the astounding feat of travelling almost 300 kilometres in just four days. Tostig and Hardrada were likely expecting Harold's eventual rebuttal but neither of them had any comprehension of the monumental journey that the king and his army had embarked on, and neither of them suspected a thing as they headed to Stamford Bridge to collect their additional hostages.

Spirits were high for the invaders' men; many of them had even left their armour behind on their ships, and some were simply relaxing in the meadows or out hunting when they spied Harold's men. From the south streamed a horde of Anglo-Saxons fully armed and ready for battle. There

Only 24 of the fleet of 300 ships were needed to take the surviving Vikings home after Stamford Bridge



Harold was the last crowned Anglo-Saxon king of England

THE BATTLE OF FULFORD

NORWEGIANS

- **COMMANDERS:** HARALD HARDRADA, TOSTIG GODWINSON
- **TROOPS:** APPROX 10,000, OF WHICH 6,000 WERE DEPLOYED
- **KEY UNIT:** EXPERIENCED WARRIORS POSITIONED ON THE FIRM GROUND NEAR THE RIVERBANK
- **STRENGTHS:** STRONG STARTING POSITION, WHICH GAVE HARALD THE HIGHER GROUND, AND SHEER FORCE OF NUMBERS
- **WEAKNESSES:** NONE
- **CASUALTIES AND LOSSES:** APPROXIMATELY 750

VS

SAXONS

- **COMMANDERS:** MORCAR OF NORTHUMBRIA, EDWIN OF MERCIA
- **TROOPS:** APPROX 5,000
- **KEY UNIT:** SHIELDMEN
- **STRENGTHS:** AN EARLY ATTACK BEFORE THE FULL VIKING FORCE ARRIVED
- **WEAKNESSES:** DISADVANTAGED STARTING POSITION, BOGGY LAND SLOWED ATTACKS
- **CASUALTIES AND LOSSES:** UP TO 1,000

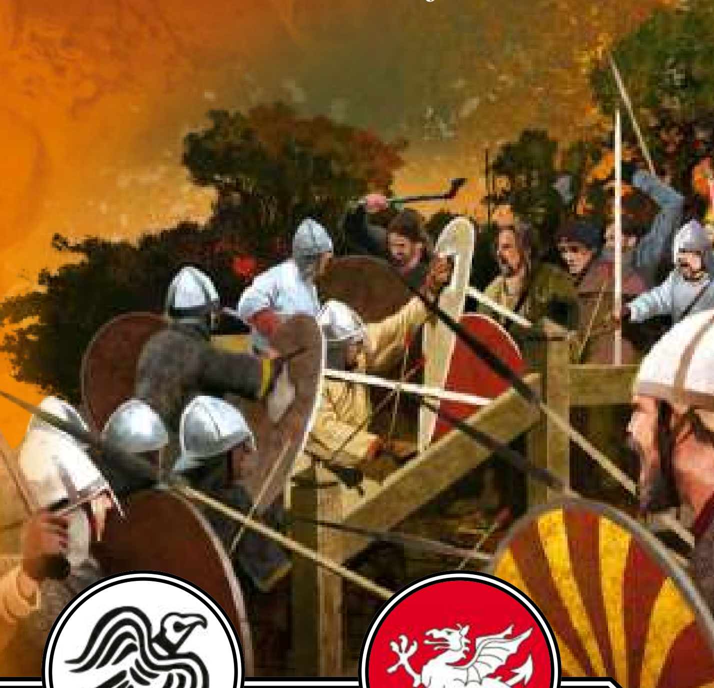
is no doubt that the English would have been exhausted, but the Nordics were completely and utterly unprepared. According to one account, a brave man rode up to Hardrada and Tostig before the battle began, offering the rebellious brother his earldom if he would turn on the Nordic king. Tostig then asked the rider what Hardrada would get, to which the rider replied, “Six feet of ground… or as much more as he needs, as he is taller than most men.” Impressed by the rider, Hardrada asked Tostig for his name; Tostig revealed that it was none other than Harold himself.

Whether this account is true or not, neither party was in the mood for deals or truces - this was to be decided once and for all the old-fashioned way. Once the scrambled Nordic forces gathered together, they deployed in a defensive position. The English cut through the invaders on the west side of the River Derwent with ease, but the bridge itself presented them with problems. They would have to pass through the vulnerable chokehold to continue their advance and, according to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, one man stood in their way. A huge Norse axe-man guarded the narrow crossing of the bridge alone, holding back the entire English army. He brutally cut down anyone who approached, until eventually he was defeated by an English soldier who floated downstream in a barrel and thrust his spear up through the bridge.

This delay gave the Nordics time to assemble a triangular shield wall, and this was where the real battle began. The tired but determined Anglo-Saxons clashed repeatedly against the Nordic shields, hammering them over and over again. The fighting lasted for hours, with the advantage changing hands many times throughout. However, the Nordics’ lack of armour cost them dearly and the ranks began to fall. Hardrada - the giant of a man and the last Viking king - was slain by an arrow to his windpipe and Tostig too met his end in the land he had fought for his entire adult life. Even reinforcements led by Eystein Orre, who had rushed all the way from Riccall, were not enough to quash the Anglo-Saxon army. This force, known as Orre’s storm, was so fatigued that it is said many collapsed and died of exhaustion as they reached the field. Although they were able to briefly hold back the defenders, they too fell victim to Harold’s determination, and then they fled for their lives.

For Harold, Stamford Bridge was an epic victory and cemented his position as a strong and reliable English king. However, it would also forever be intrinsically linked to his downfall. Just three days after Harold’s success, another would-be king landed on his shores. William had finally arrived.

Harold feared William for good reason; the duke of Normandy had a fearsome reputation, and this was not all bravado. William had been born to his father’s mistress, and his



THE BATTLE OF STAMFORD BRIDGE

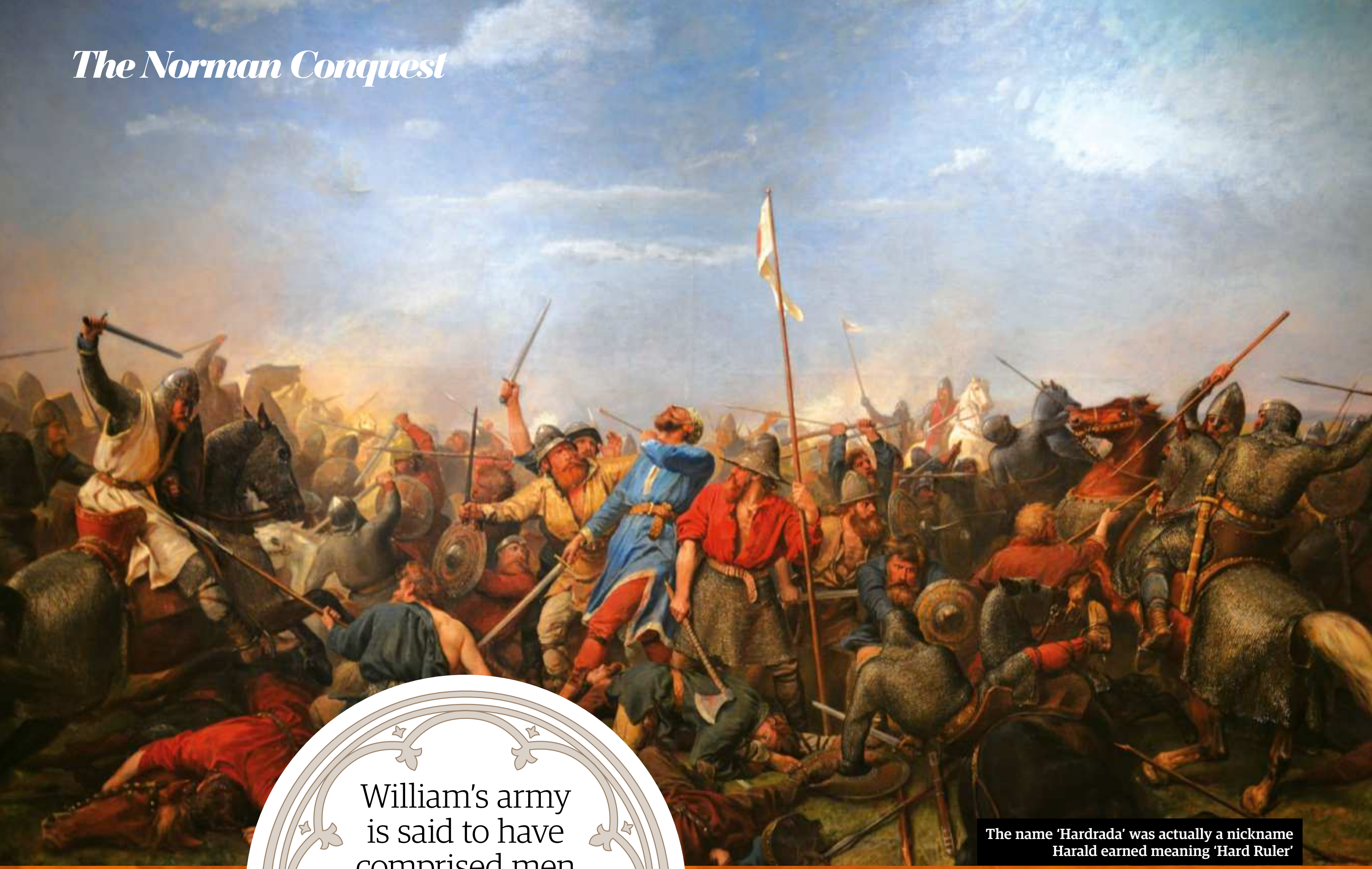
NORWEGIANS

- **COMMANDERS:** HARALD HARDRADA, TOSTIG GODWINSON
- **TROOPS:** APPROX 9,000, 3,000 OF WHICH ARRIVED LATE
- **KEY UNIT:** AXE-MEN
- **STRENGTHS:** AN ALMOST IMPENETRABLE SHIELD WALL
- **WEAKNESSES:** UNPREPARED, MANY MEN WERE WITHOUT ARMOUR
- **CASUALTIES AND LOSSES:** APPROX 6,000

VS

SAXONS

- **COMMANDER:** HAROLD GODWINSON
- **TROOPS:** APPROX 15,000, SIGNIFICANTLY MORE THAN THE NORWEGIAN FORCE
- **KEY UNIT:** THE PROFESSIONAL HOUSECARLS
- **STRENGTHS:** THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE
- **WEAKNESSES:** FORCED TO CROSS THE NARROW CHOKE-POINT OF THE BRIDGE
- **CASUALTIES AND LOSSES:** APPROX 5,000



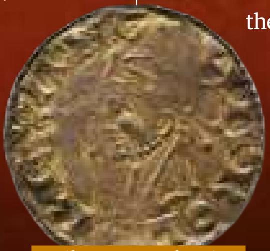
The name 'Hardrada' was actually a nickname Harald earned meaning 'Hard Ruler'

William's army is said to have comprised men from Normandy, Brittany, Aquitaine, France and Maine

illegitimate status had plagued him throughout his life. Commonly referred to as 'The Bastard' by his enemies, William was a man who, from the age of seven or eight, had faced constant criticism and challenge because of who he was. Throughout his life he had to fight for everything he had. William had grown up in a land gripped by war and chaos, he had been jostled between ambitious nobles who wished to use him for power, and from his earliest years of rule he had to squash constant rebellions. In spite of this, through sheer determination and a clever marriage to Matilda of Flanders, William 'The Bastard' had managed to consolidate power in Normandy against all odds.

This whole experience had made the duke hard, tough and fiercely determined to succeed - there wasn't much in life that could hold William back, and Harold claiming the throne that was rightfully his was not something he could just stand by and accept. The two men were no strangers - William had saved Harold when he was held hostage and the two men proceeded to fight side by side. Harold was even recorded as having rescued two of William's soldiers from quicksand. Together the two defeated William's enemy, Conan II, and William thanked Harold for his services with a knighthood. If William's claim was true, and Harold did swear an oath to the duke, then it is easy to understand why this hot-blooded warrior was furious at Harold's betrayal. Once a friend, he was now an enemy, and William knew only one way to deal with enemies: war was in his blood, he was moulded by it.

William's timing was disastrous for Harold but hugely beneficial to himself. The duke had enough time to build a wooden castle at Hastings, raid the surrounding area and thoroughly prepare his force for the oncoming storm. Harold, meanwhile, was anything but prepared. The English king had left a great number of his forces in the north, and the men he did bring had to march south from London in approximately a week. By the time they reached Senlac Hill, near Hastings, they were exhausted.



A silver penny showing a contemporary, if rather faded, depiction of Harold Godwinson

Harold knew his surprise tactics would not work here, so he set up his army in a defensive position atop the hill. His flanks were protected by marshy land. He positioned his strongest fighters, the housecarls, at the front of his shield wall. At 9am, the trumpets rang out and the Normans moved. The archers attacked first, sending arrows raining over the English. However, Harold's position on the hill, and his soldiers' sturdy shields, prevented much damage.

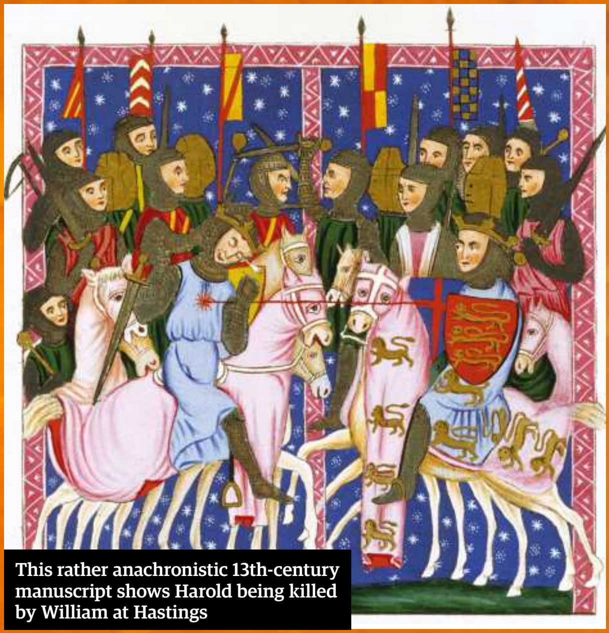
William decided that if the archers couldn't do it then he would have to act quickly. He sent his army forward in three groups, with himself riding through the middle, the papal banner billowing above his head. The attackers rode hard, but they were still unable to break the Anglo-Saxon shield wall, and they retreated once more. Harold's men, excited by what seemed like another victory, gave chase to the fleeing Normans. It was at this point that a rumour began to circulate that William had been killed. Sensing a lull in morale, the duke pushed back his helmet and rode among his men, commanding them to attack the English who had broken away from the hill. With a revitalised Norman force, the English were overwhelmed, and few who descended the hill survived to rejoin their fellow soldiers.

At around midday, there was a lull in the battle, with both sides resting and replenishing their strength, it was then that William decided to change tactics. Witnessing the victory of the previous English pursuit, he decided to draw them out again. When the battle resumed, the Norman cavalry thundered forward into the shield wall. The fighting was brutal and desperate, with Harold's own brothers cut down in middle of the melee, but still the shield wall held fast. As ordered, the Normans retreated and once more Harold's men pursued them down the hill. All at once William's soldiers turned and attacked the English.

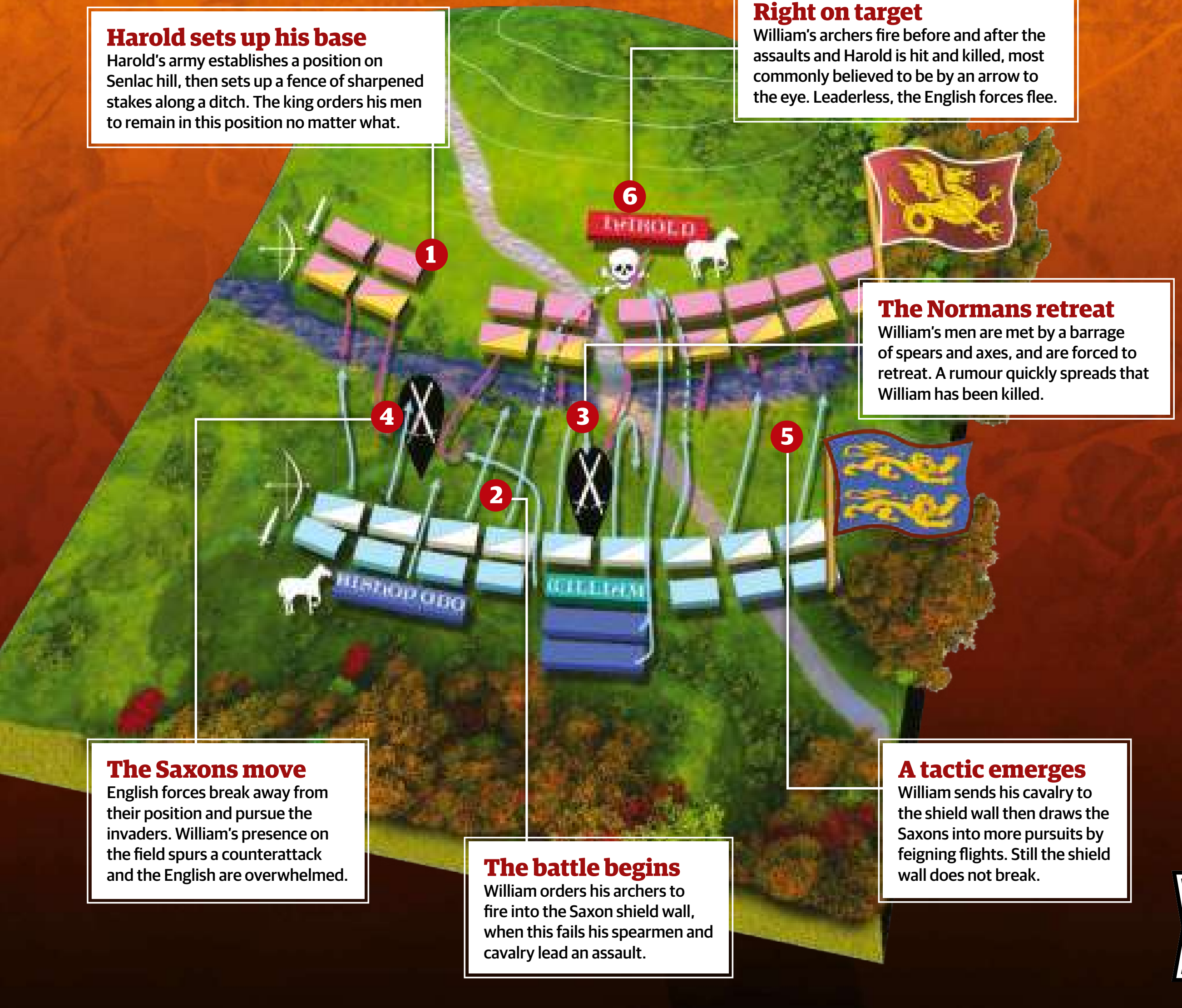
The battle waged on until 4pm, and with the English numbers now severely depleted, the shield wall grew shorter and weaker. William saw his opportunity and sent his whole army up the hill while the archers continued to fire their arrows, and this time it worked. The shield wall finally broke and the Normans wreaked havoc, cutting down Harold's remaining housecarls and, at some point, the cursed king himself.

It is of some debate if Harold died as a result of an arrow to the eye or was felled with a sword, as the famous Bayeux Tapestry depicts both. What we do know is that his death had a tremendous effect on his men. Leaderless, the Anglo-Saxons began to flee the field into the woods behind. However, Harold's loyal soldiers of the royal household remained by his body and fought until the end.

Hastings was not an easily won battle - William too lost a great number of his men, and bodies were still found on the hillside years later. When Harold's mother requested that William return her son's body to him, he refused, stating that Harold should be buried on the shore of the land he sought to guard. Still rumours persisted that Harold had not died at all, but instead had gone into hiding to one day return and reclaim his land. The people's love for Harold was still strong, and although William may have won the battle, the war to truly become the ruler of England and its people was one that would wage for years to come.


This rather anachronistic 13th-century manuscript shows Harold being killed by William at Hastings

"Once a friend, he was now an enemy, and William knew only one way to deal with enemies: war was in his blood, he was moulded by it"



Harold sets up his base
Harold's army establishes a position on Senlac hill, then sets up a fence of sharpened stakes along a ditch. The king orders his men to remain in this position no matter what.

The battle begins
William orders his archers to fire into the Saxon shield wall, when this fails his spearmen and cavalry lead an assault.

The Normans retreat
William's men are met by a barrage of spears and axes, and are forced to retreat. A rumour quickly spreads that William has been killed.

The Saxons move
English forces break away from their position and pursue the invaders. William's presence on the field spurs a counterattack and the English are overwhelmed.

A tactic emerges
William sends his cavalry to the shield wall then draws the Saxons into more pursuits by feigning flights. Still the shield wall does not break.

Right on target
William's archers fire before and after the assaults and Harold is hit and killed, most commonly believed to be by an arrow to the eye. Leaderless, the English forces flee.

THE BATTLE OF HASTINGS

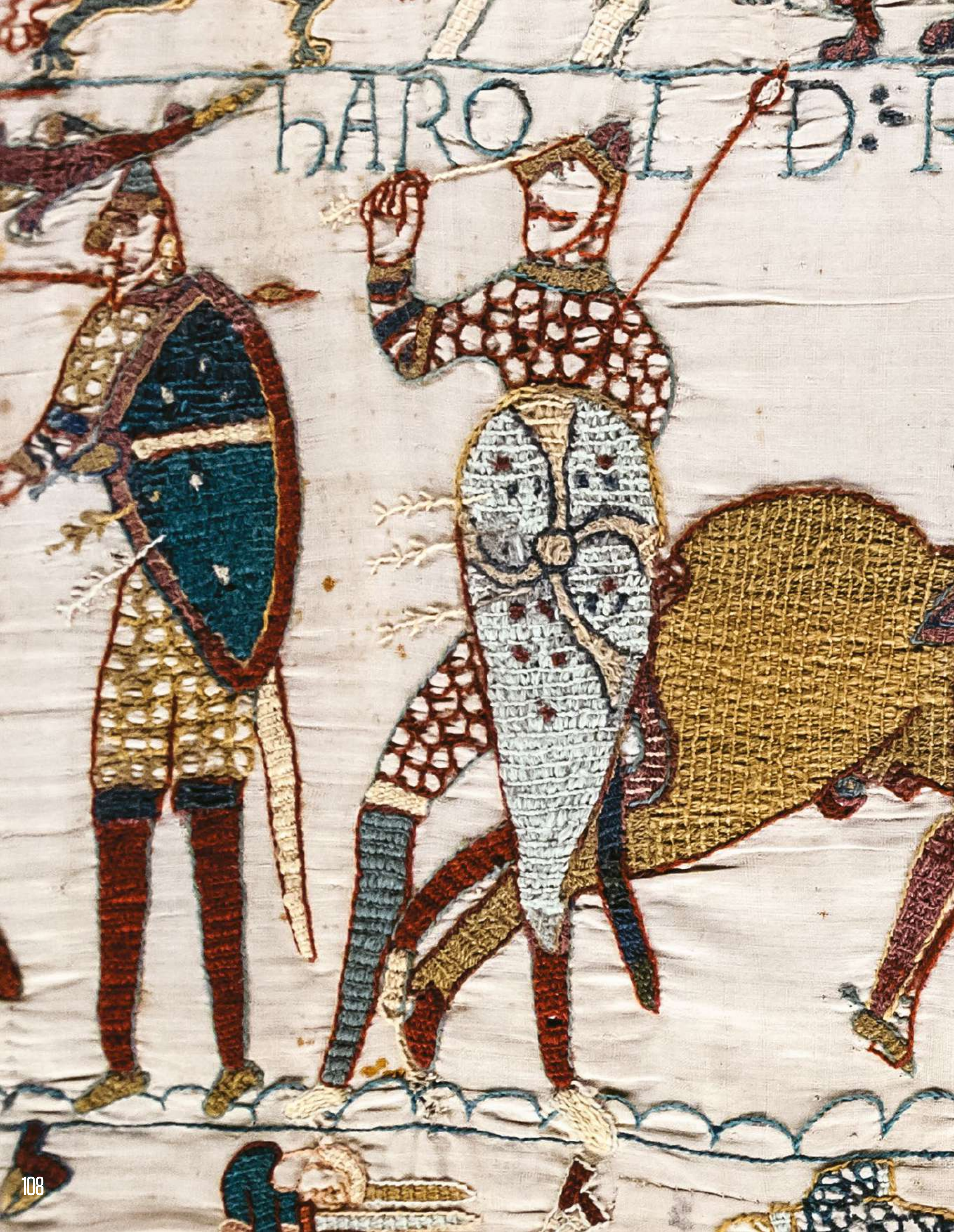
NORMANS

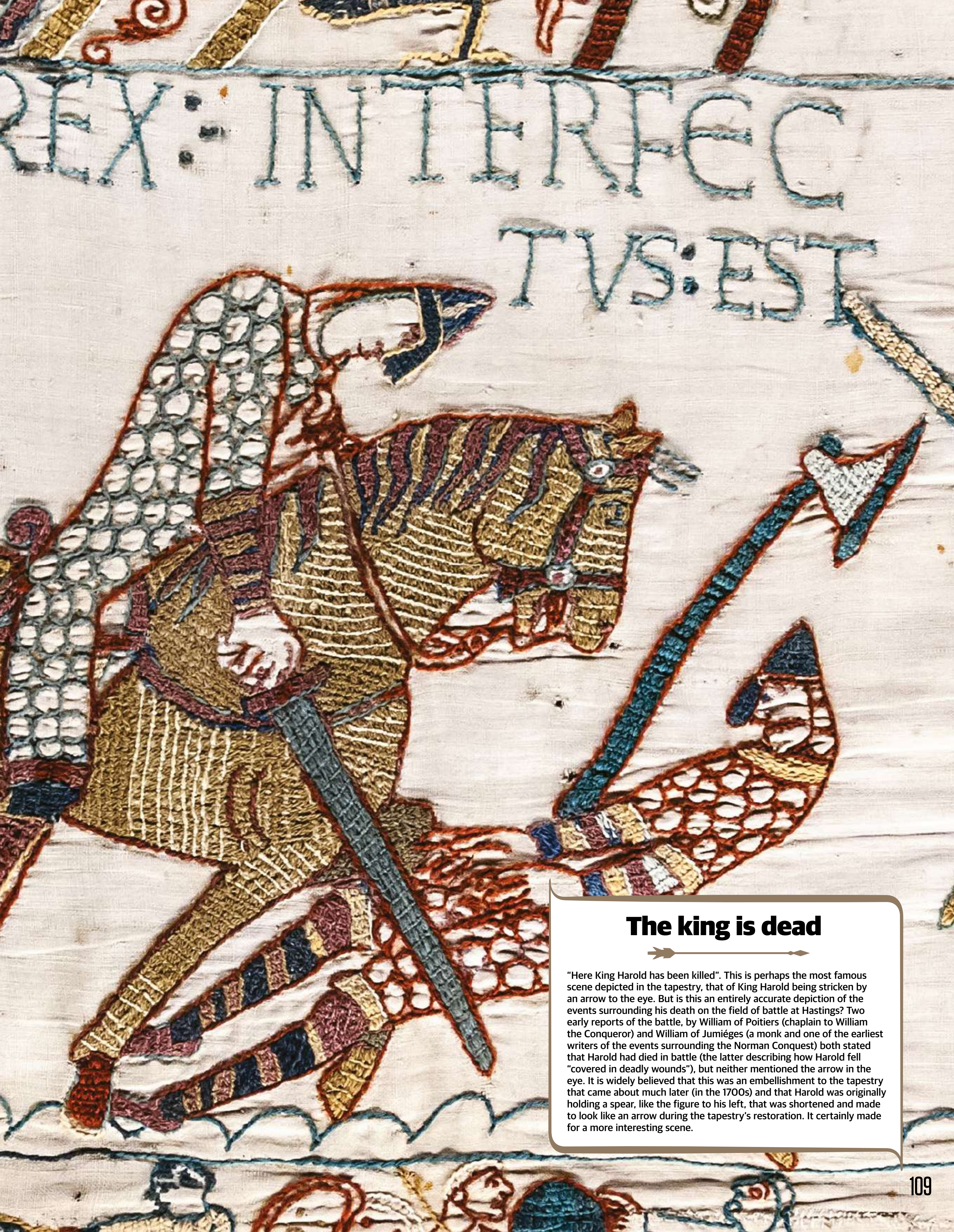
- **COMMANDER:** WILLIAM OF NORMANDY
- **TROOPS:** UNKNOWN, APPROX 7,000-12,000
- **KEY UNIT:** NORMAN CAVALRY
- **STRENGTHS:** AN EXPERIENCED LEADER AND RESTED TROOPS
- **WEAKNESSES:** WEAK STARTING POSITION: THE ENGLISH WERE POSITIONED ON THE TOP OF THE HILL WITH THEIR FLANKS PROTECTED
- **CASUALTIES AND LOSSES:** UNKNOWN BUT THE FIGURES WERE HEAVY. HOWEVER, NOT AS HIGH AS THE SAXON LOSSES

VS

SAXONS

- **COMMANDER:** HAROLD GODWINSON
- **TROOPS:** UNKNOWN, APPROX 5,000-13,000
- **KEY UNIT:** THE KING'S BODYGUARDS, OR 'HOUSECARLS'
- **STRENGTHS:** THE TREMENDOUSLY DEADLY BATTLE-AXES
- **WEAKNESSES:** SIGNIFICANT LOSSES RECENTLY ENDURED AT THE BATTLE OF STAMFORD BRIDGE, LACK OF CAVALRY
- **CASUALTIES AND LOSSES:** APPROX 50 PER CENT OF THE FORCE


hAROLD:



The king is dead

"Here King Harold has been killed". This is perhaps the most famous scene depicted in the tapestry, that of King Harold being stricken by an arrow to the eye. But is this an entirely accurate depiction of the events surrounding his death on the field of battle at Hastings? Two early reports of the battle, by William of Poitiers (chaplain to William the Conqueror) and William of Jumiéges (a monk and one of the earliest writers of the events surrounding the Norman Conquest) both stated that Harold had died in battle (the latter describing how Harold fell "covered in deadly wounds"), but neither mentioned the arrow in the eye. It is widely believed that this was an embellishment to the tapestry that came about much later (in the 1700s) and that Harold was originally holding a spear, like the figure to his left, that was shortened and made to look like an arrow during the tapestry's restoration. It certainly made for a more interesting scene.

EDGAR ÆTHELING

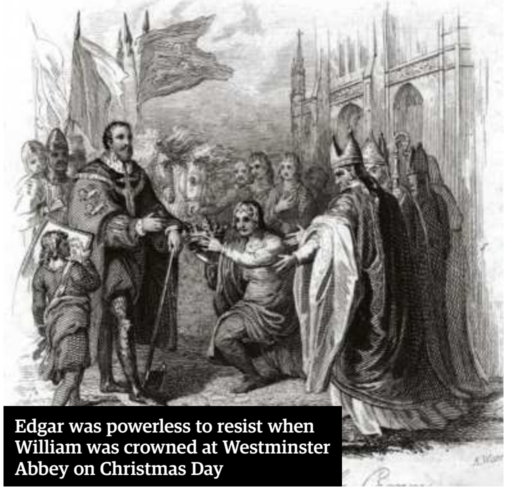
Harold Godwinson was dead, his forces scattered and leaderless. As the king passed away, the future of Saxon England now lay with a little-known teenager

As Harold lay dying on the battlefield, the House of Wessex was nearing its final page. With the Saxon army in disarray and the Norse having retreated back to Scandinavia, William had the upper hand in the race for the English throne. Only one person stood in his way: a little-known Ætheling or Anglo-Saxon prince by the name of Edgar.

The boy wasn't the ideal choice for king but he was the only male who could continue the Saxon line. His royal heritage came from his grandfather, former Saxon king Edmund Ironside. Edgar's father was known as Edward the Exile and he never became king after leaving the country when Edmund was defeated by Cnut. Edgar was born in Hungary during his father's exile and the family returned to England in 1057 during the reign of Edward the Confessor, who had requested Edward to be his successor. When Edgar's father died shortly after their arrival, the family were was taken in to the royal court.

Edward the Confessor died in January 1066 and a succession crisis gripped England. With no direct heir, Edgar was the next in line to the throne but he was considered too young. Instead, the king's brother-in-law and decorated soldier Harold Godwinson took the throne as Harold II. The news of Harold's death at Hastings reached the ruling classes or Witenagemot in London soon after the battle's end. The decision was taken to install Edgar as the king of England - it was a gamble, but there was no other option if the Saxon line was to be maintained. The rightful heir to Edward the Confessor finally had the crown but with William of Normandy on the march and the Vikings still a threat, how long could his reign realistically last?

"After being brought back to London, the boy-king was forced to abdicate after only reigning for two months"



Edgar was powerless to resist when William was crowned at Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day

Edgar was never officially crowned - instead, a regency council was hurriedly formed in London that would rule in his name. Plans were afoot to raise a second army that would do what Harold had failed to do: kill William and run the Normans from English lands. Edgar's supporters planned to use the still-strong navy to cut off Norman support from France but with so many nobles falling at Hastings, there were very few left with the power to carry this out.

William endured very little, if any, resistance from Hastings through to London, but Edgar and his followers did muster enough support to make a stand on London Bridge. This was initially successful but the stubborn William was determined to take London. The Norman army ransacked areas of Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire, eventually surrounding the city. The ferocity of the assault on the southeast shocked the Saxon nobility who submitted to William's rule one by one. Stigand, the archbishop of Canterbury, was one of Edgar's most powerful allies, but after the Norman show of intent even he now formally recognised Norman rule. Edgar attempted to flee the city but his party was apprehended in Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, as it tried to escape.

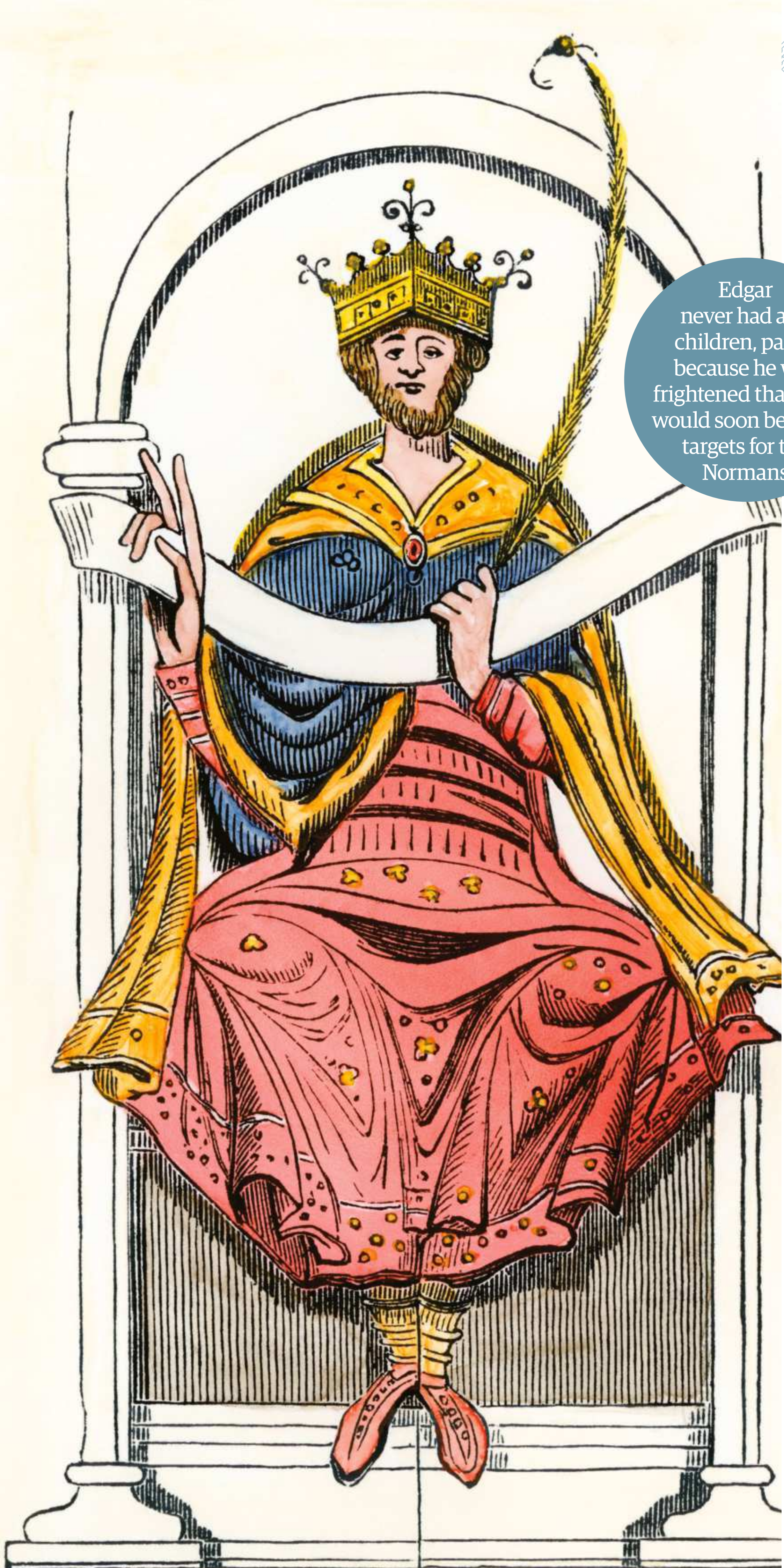
After being brought back to London, the boy-king was forced to abdicate after reigning for only two months between October and December 1066.

Edgar had two sisters: Margaret was queen consort of Scotland, while Christina was the head of an abbey

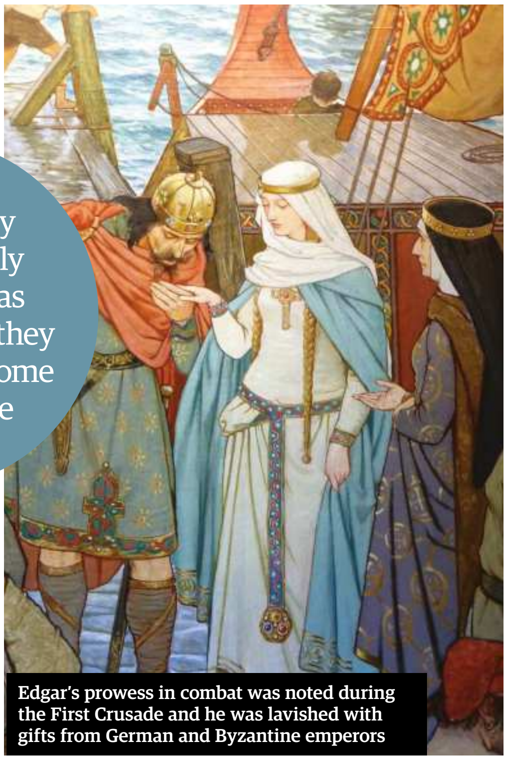
William kept a watchful eye over young Edgar and even planned to marry Edgar's elder sister, Margaret. It's not known what Edgar's role was in the new Norman administration. He was part of William's court for a period and the Domesday Book states that he owned two estates in Hertfordshire. By 1068, the former king had fled north with his family to Scotland but he would later return. He would lose the lands given to him by the surprisingly generous William, but he believed it was worth the risk. Rebellion was coming.

Edgar never realised his destiny as king of England but was often willing to support others who didn't approve of Norman hegemony. With London, Winchester and the majority of the south of England feeling the might of William's iron fist, he allied with Scottish king Malcolm III in an attempt to expel the Normans. He even managed to coerce the Danes into joining his cause, but after initial victories, William first paid off the Norsemen and then left no quarter, destroying all resistance in the Harrying of the North.

Edgar fled to France after realising that he couldn't beat William and his life was still in danger. He had no option but to make peace with the House of Normandy and retired to relative obscurity in William's court. Restless after ten years under Norman rule, Edgar left to fight in the Holy Land at Antioch and Jerusalem during the First Crusade. He died in 1125, taking with him the last hope of an Anglo-Saxon king ever reclaiming the English throne.



Edgar never had any children, partly because he was frightened that they would soon become targets for the Normans



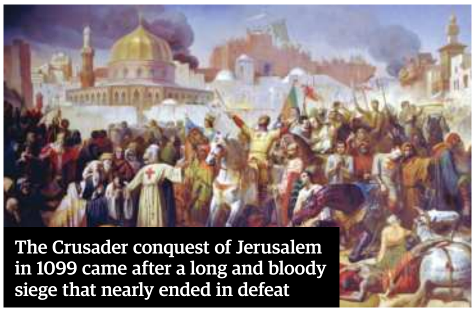
Edgar's prowess in combat was noted during the First Crusade and he was lavished with gifts from German and Byzantine emperors

More than just an uncrowned king

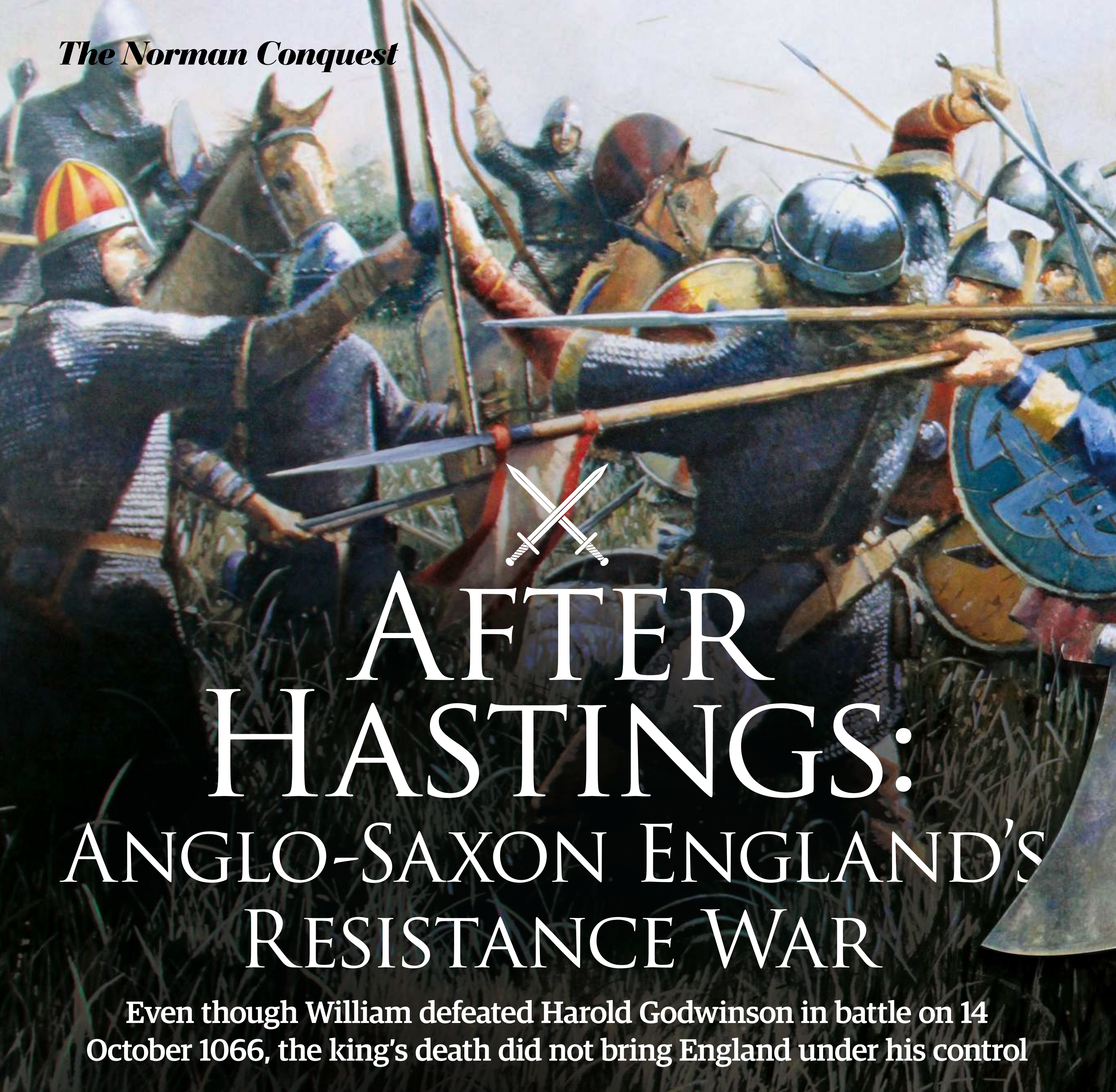
The First Crusade was called in 1095 and many English Anglo-Normans answered Pope Urban II's plea to travel to the Holy Land. Among them was Edgar Ætheling, who was keen to fight after admitting defeat in retaking England. He joined up with the Crusaders at Constantinople and was tasked with commanding an English fleet.

Edgar's leadership was praised during the conflict, which was successful for the Crusaders as they conquered Jerusalem, establishing a new Christian kingdom in the process. So lauded was Edgar's contribution that he was lavished with gifts from both German and Byzantine emperors, and even offered a place at both of their respective courts, which he politely declined.

Instead, Edgar was intent on returning to England. He had fought alongside Robert II, Duke of Normandy, during the Crusade and had allied with him. England was now under the leadership of Henry I and desired more land on the continent. Edgar and Robert fought Henry at the Battle of Tinchebray but were defeated and imprisoned. Edgar had been a headstrong campaigner all his life ever since he witnessed William's march to power in 1066. Conceding defeat was to be Edgar's final act and he retired to a life of obscurity in southern England, never to raise a sword again.



The Crusader conquest of Jerusalem in 1099 came after a long and bloody siege that nearly ended in defeat



AFTER HASTINGS: ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND'S RESISTANCE WAR

Even though William defeated Harold Godwinson in battle on 14 October 1066, the king's death did not bring England under his control

Harold lay dead, his face so hacked that it was all but impossible to identify his body. Nearby lay his brothers, Gyrth and Leofwine. William, Duke of Normandy, had laid waste the family that had dominated England through the last years of the childless King Edward the Confessor.

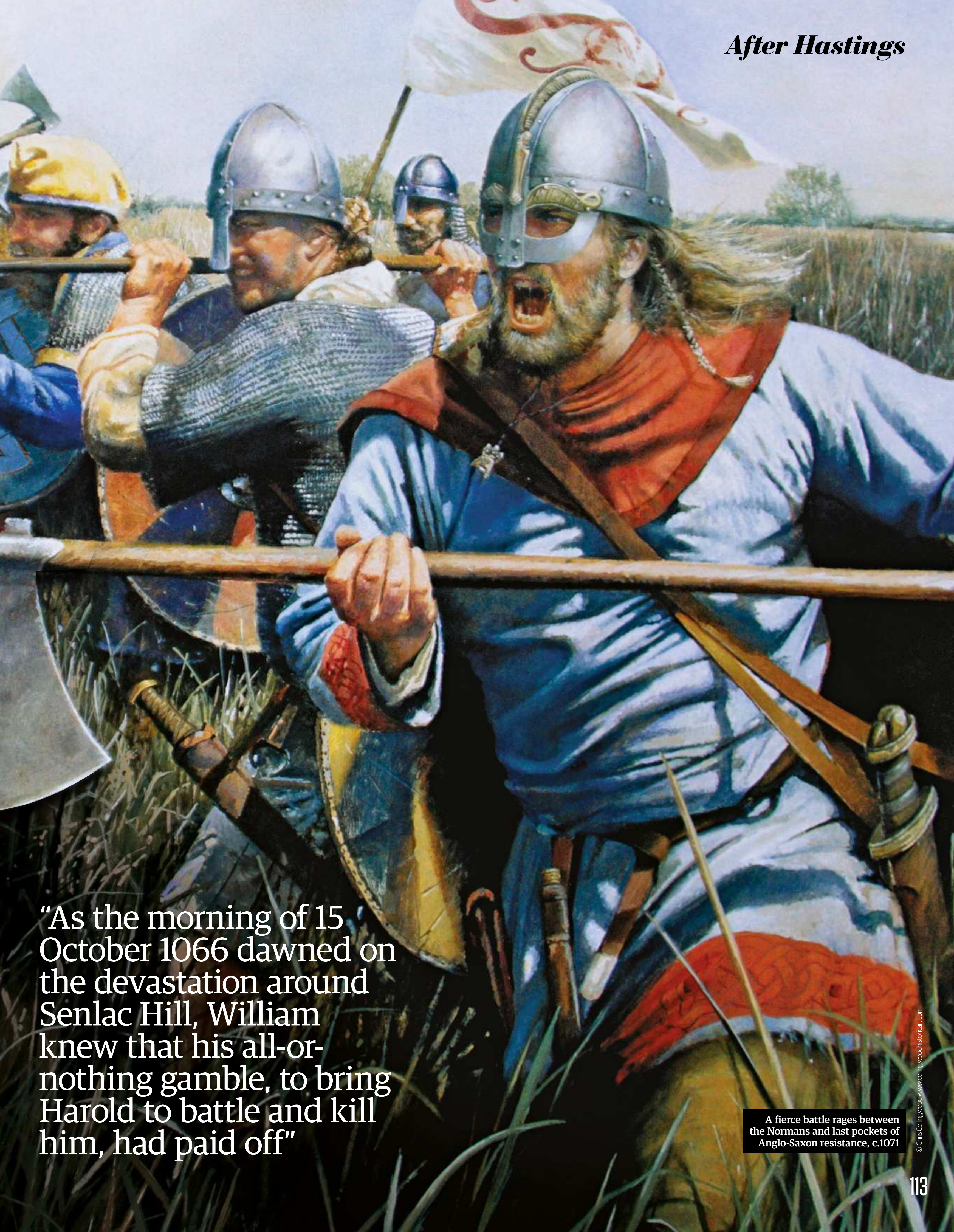
As the morning of 15 October 1066 dawned on the devastation around Senlac Hill, William knew that his all-or-nothing gamble, to bring Harold to battle and kill him, had paid off.

The duke – for he was still not the king – withdrew his forces to Hastings and, in the words of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, "…waited there to know whether the people would submit to him". But the people did not.

Yes, William had killed Harold, but killing a king didn't automatically make you king in his place; Anglo-Saxon rules of royal succession required the support of the Witenagemot, the assembly of a kingdom's leading men. While William had killed plenty of England's leading men at the Battle of Hastings, there were more than enough still alive to hail a different man as king.

Which they did. In London, which was teeming with armed men – both those who had escaped after the battle and others who had not made it to Hastings in time to take part – the earls Eadwine and Morcar, and the archbishops of Canterbury and York, declared the great-nephew of Edward the Confessor king. Edgar Ætheling was about 15 and the last surviving male descendant of Alfred the Great. Of all the claimants to England's throne, he had by far the most convincing case. But Harold, the most powerful man in the country, had muscled the young Edgar out of the way when the Confessor died, making him the first earl of Oxford as a sop.

However, William, convinced of the right of his cause, was not going to wait forever for the English to come and give him the crown. "When he found that they would not come to him," William went to



A fierce battle rages between the Normans and last pockets of Anglo-Saxon resistance, c.1071

© Chris Collingwood www.collingwoodhistoricart.com

> “As the morning of 15 October 1066 dawned on the devastation around Senlac Hill, William knew that his all-or-nothing gamble, to bring Harold to battle and kill him, had paid off”

them, in blood and fury. The first stop was Romney. This was unfortunate for the town as some of the Norman army had landed there by mistake and been killed. Leaving what remained of it behind, William continued east to Dover. There was no castle there – although there soon would be – but the natural geography of the site provided defenders with great advantages. However, William's implacable advance terrified the defenders into surrender, and soon after, the town burned. Having seen the strategic nature of the site for himself, William may have built the first version of Dover Castle during his stay.

If he had not known it before, by now William knew that he had to take London to unlock the country. So, leaving a garrison in Dover to secure his rear, he advanced on the capital. The terrified inhabitants of the towns on the way came out to offer their submission. Their fear was realistic: the Normans were living off the land, which meant plundering the villages and towns on their way.

London, though, was different. Safe on the far bank of the Thames, its defenders even had the courage to sortie across London Bridge – one of the many early incarnations before the most enduring version was built at the end of the 12th century. Although the sortie was unsuccessful, the Normans could not take the bridge or cross the river. Safe across the water and behind the city walls, the young Edgar still ruled as king, now a month after the battle. William had received the submission of only those parts of the country he had directly terrorised with his soldiers.

Faced with this refusal to acknowledge him, William set out on a path of terror. With an amphibious assault out of the question, the Normans switched from foraging to full-on destruction. They swung west, across Hampshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire before coming to Wallingford, where the Thames could be safely forded by William's forces. William's army now approached the capital city from the northwest, burning through Middlesex and Hertfordshire on his way. He had learned these tactics in the long and bitter struggle for control of his own duchy, and now turned his battle-hardened army loose on a new country.

In London, the 15-year-old king was unable to galvanise resistance. Perhaps if Eadwine and Morcar, earls of Mercia and Northumbria, had supported him wholeheartedly, Edgar might have inspired the people to endure the oncoming siege. But, as news of William's advance reached London, support dropped away from the king. Eadwine and Morcar withdrew, taking their men with them. With the men who had acclaimed him king deserting, Edgar must have felt he had little hope, and as news of William's advance reached the city, panic and hopelessness spread.

A silver coin depicting William the Conqueror. Putting his likeness on coinage would help extend his influence over Britain

> "Edgar must have felt he had little hope, and as news of William's advance reach the city, panic and hopelessness spread"

In the end, Edgar had no choice. As the year drew down into darkness, the young king rode out of London with a retinue of bishops and magnates and, presenting himself to William at Berkhamsted, laid the throne of England before the duke.

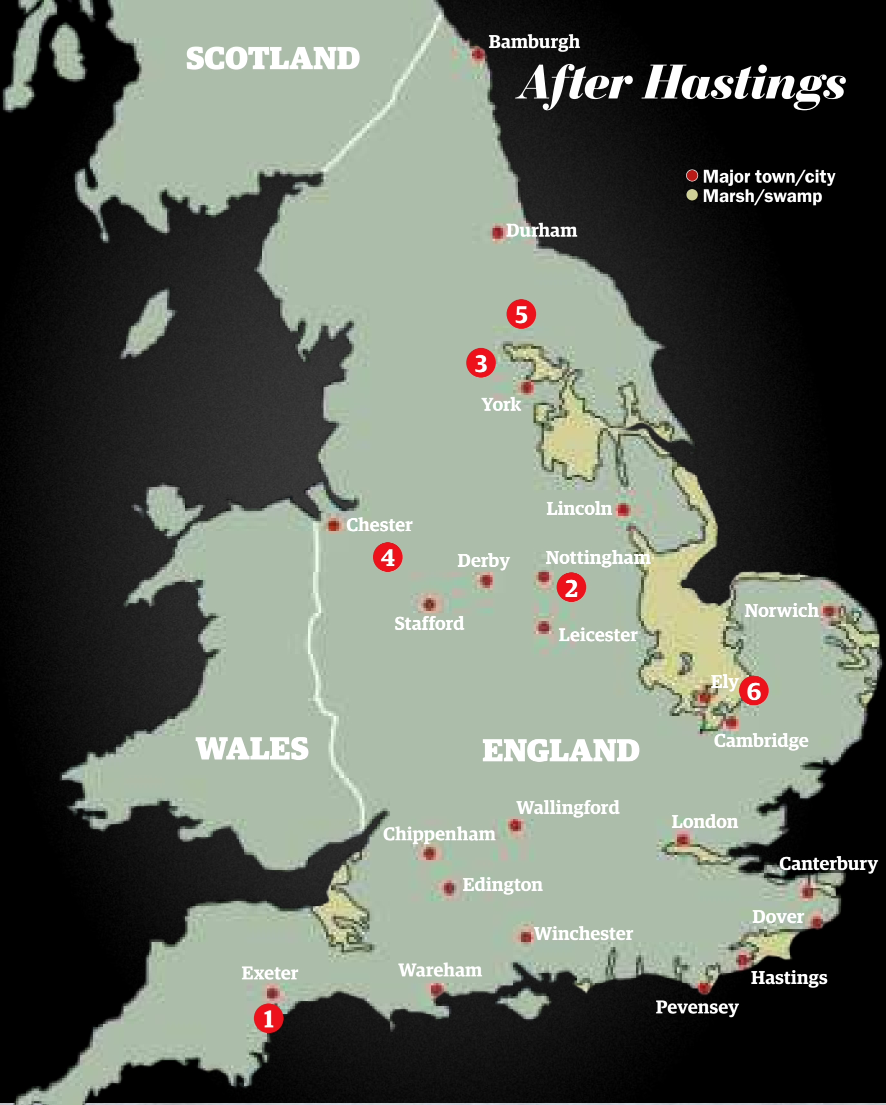
While that might have been enough for the English, for the Normans, William was not king until he was crowned. So, on Christmas Day 1066, William entered the great abbey church to be anointed and crowned king, leaving men-at-arms outside to keep guard. At least, they were supposed to be on guard. When the archbishop asked the congregation in Westminster Abbey to acclaim William as king, the guards supposedly thought the great shout from within meant their leader was being attacked, so they set fire to the houses nearby. Pretty useless guards then: king betrayed and they stay outside.

No, the guards must have thought they could take advantage of the coronation to continue what they had been doing for the last month: pillaging. The *Chronicle* reads: "The flames quickly spreading, the people in the church were seized with panic in the midst of their rejoicings, and crowds of men and women, of all ranks and conditions, eagerly struggled to make their

The war against William

The guerrilla war against the conquest lasted for five years and left much of the country, particularly in the north, devastated. This is where it happened

1. Gytha, mother of Harold Godwinson, leads Exeter in rebellion, while waiting for Harold's sons to arrive with mercenaries. William besieges the city and, after a bitter fight, it surrenders, but not before Gytha makes her escape.
2. The first major rebellion takes place with Edgar the Ætheling as its figurehead with support from the Earls of Mercia and Northumbria. William's army devastates the region. The rebellion is rapidly crushed but its leaders escape.
3. Robert Cumin, appointed earl of Northumbria by William, is killed, along with hundreds of his men in Durham. The north revolts and takes York, but William, arriving at speed, puts the rebels to flight. They take refuge in the marshlands to the east.
4. Further rebellions break out. William harries the land and defeats the rebels outside Stafford.
5. The Harrying of the North. Having bought off the Danes, William sets his army to devastate the entire region.
6. The final spasm of Anglo-Saxon resistance, led by Hereward the Wake, gradually sputters into nothing.


After Hastings
● Major town/city
● Marsh/swamp
SCOTLAND
Bamburgh
Durham
5
3
York
Lincoln
Chester
4
Derby
Nottingham
2
Stafford
Leicester
Norwich
Ely
6
Cambridge
WALES
ENGLAND
Wallingford
Chippenham
London
Canterbury
Edington
Dover
Winchester
Exeter
Wareham
Hastings
Pevensey
1

Even after their victory at Hastings, the Normans still had to fight to tighten their grip on the British isles

“Making her base in the walled city of Exeter, Gytha sent messages to other English towns to rise up against the conqueror, while other feelers were sent to her contacts at the Danish court”

escape from the church.” William was crowned in an all-but-empty church while outside the flames raged and people fought. It was to be an all too apt start to his reign as king of England.

Now monarch, William set about distributing the spoils. The land of those who died at Hastings, William regarded as forfeit to him. As Harold and his brothers had owned huge amounts of the country, there was plenty to go around. The two earls, Eadwine and Morcar, who had supported Edgar, appeared before William to swear him fealty.

The country seemed secure. Leaving his chief lieutenants as regents, William returned to Normandy six months after he had arrived, taking Edgar Ætheling, Stigand, the archbishop of Canterbury, and earls Eadwine and Morcar with him. Although the king was stepping back into his dukedom, he was taking some hostages against his fortune.

Back in England, William’s regents were taking precautions of a kind entirely new to the English: castles. Although Alfred had established burhs, fortified towns, as part of his defence plan against the Vikings, castles as strong points to defend and dominate the surrounding country were unknown. The magnates William had left in charge set to with a will, pressing the populace to erect the buildings of their domination, while looking the other way as their men continued to plunder and pillage. It was not the recipe for peace.

The first to shake off the torpor of defeat was the aptly named Eadric the Wild, who ravaged Herefordshire in the summer of 1067, defeating Norman patrols but, despite besieging it, he was unable to take Hereford Castle. With the English earls taken hostage, it was up to the lower levels of English society to act.

Next up, the men of Kent. With the brand new Dover Castle rising from its headland, they had an obvious target, but not the means to take it. However, there were others regarding this land with envious eyes: Eustace, Count of Boulogne. Not an obvious choice of ally, given that he’d fought alongside William at Hastings, but the count had fallen out with the duke over the division of the spoils. Landing at Dover, he laid siege to the castle, but the Norman defenders did more than hold out: they sallied forth before more English rebels could assemble and put Eustace’s men to flight. The count himself made it back to his boats but many of his men did not.

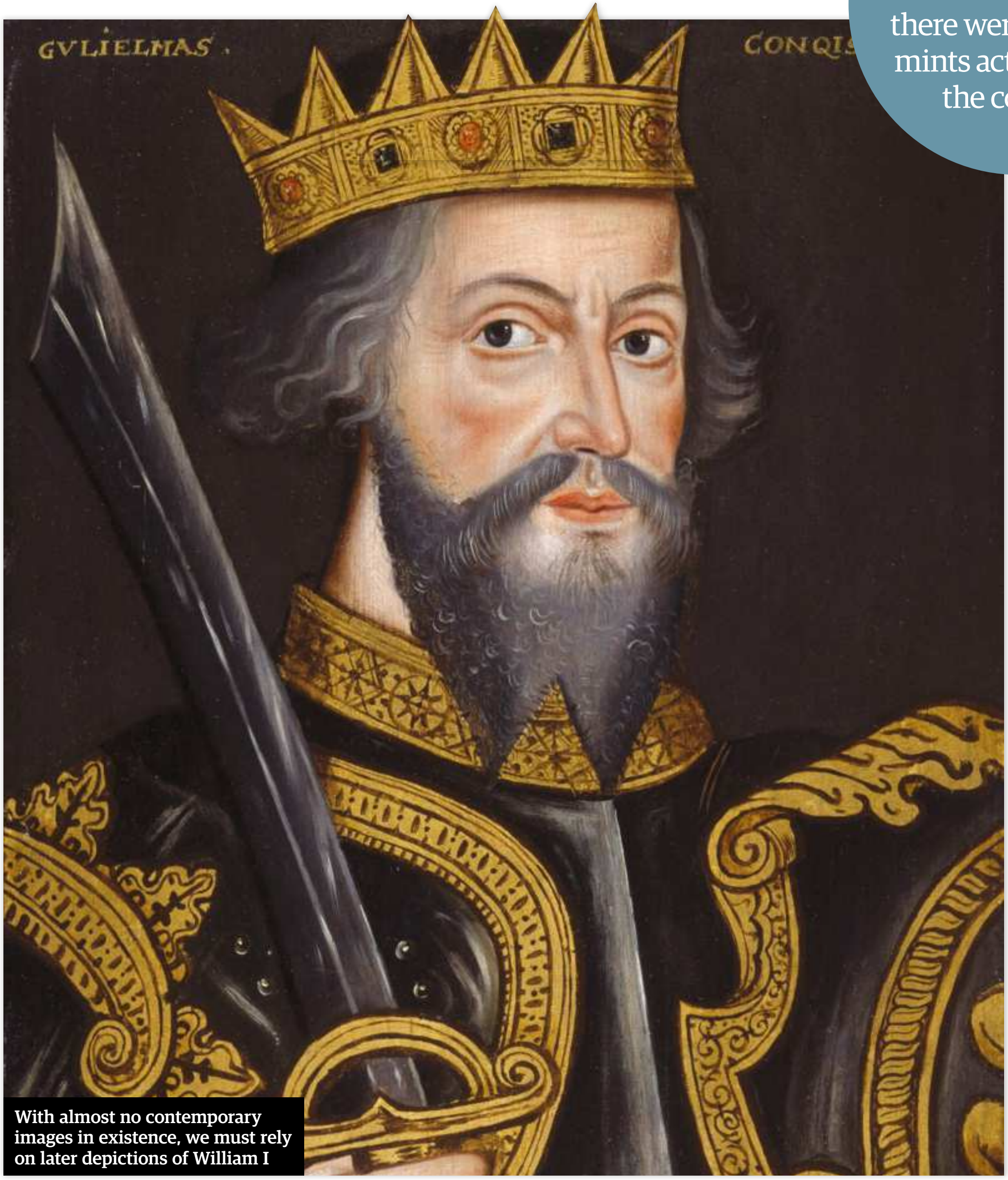
Northumbria – that is, the old kingdom, the land north of the Humber – would provide the greatest resistance and suffer the worst retribution in the struggle against the Normans. The first inkling was when the (English) lord given charge of the lands north of the Tyne by William, a thegn called Copsig, was killed by the man whose land it had been previously, Oswulf. Oswulf beheaded Copsig himself. However, before he could become a focus for resistance, he was killed by a robber.

These though, were small-scale affairs. It would take something more serious to bring William scurrying back over the Channel – like a conspiracy by the surviving Godwinsons led by Harold’s mother, Gytha. Making her base in the walled city of Exeter, Gytha sent messages to other English towns to rise up against the conqueror, while other feelers were sent to her contacts at the Danish court, and Harold’s sons by his first wife, Edith Swan-Neck, attempted to raise an army in Ireland.

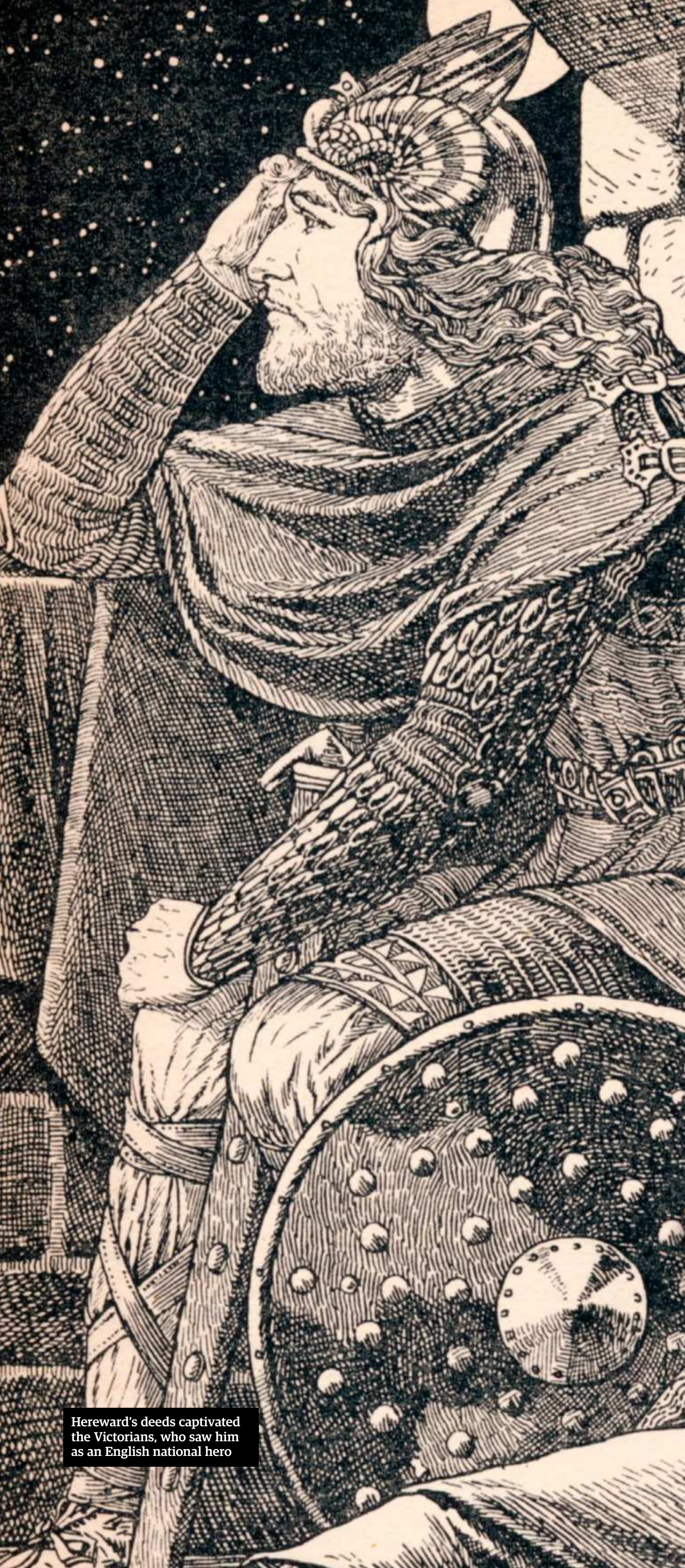
From London, where he had spent Christmas of 1067, William marched southwest, summoning his new English subjects to fight alongside him. But, approaching Exeter, it seemed the rebellion had again fizzled out: the leading citizens of the city came to meet the conqueror and swear obedience, giving him hostages as a mark of their good faith.

But going back to the city, they closed the gates of Exeter against William. Maybe they were playing for time, hoping to delay the king so that reinforcements

During William’s reign, demand for coins was so high that there were about 70 mints active across the country



With almost no contemporary images in existence, we must rely on later depictions of William I



Hereward's deeds captivated the Victorians, who saw him as an English national hero

The end of the Anglo-Saxons?

Under William's rule, Old English customs were almost entirely lost in favour of Norman ones

The Domesday Book, William's inventory of the country, shows that by 1086, Englishmen owned only five per cent of the country's land, and this proportion was reduced further in the following decades. William of Malmesbury, writing in the early 12th century, said: "England has become the dwelling place of foreigners and a playground for lords of alien blood. No Englishman today is an earl, a bishop or an abbot."

Those who had survived the invasion, and the subsequent rebellions, went abroad, seeking out sanctuary in Scotland, Scandinavia, Ireland and further afield, sometimes much further afield to places like Byzantium. Emigrating Englishmen found employment with the emperor's elite Varangian Guard, so much so that what was previously a Scandinavian unit became known as a largely Anglo-Saxon one.

They left behind a land where the language of the elite had changed too: Latin and French were spoken in William's court and this continued through the reign of his son and heir, William Rufus. However, when Rufus was killed by a misshot arrow while hunting in his father's New Forest (William had lost his second son, Richard, to another hunting accident in the forest some 30 years earlier), his younger brother, Henry I, began a revival in English and English customs that might have led to early reconciliation if it was not for his lack of a male heir. Henry designated his daughter, Matilda, as ruler but Stephen, William's grandson, wanted the crown for himself. The ensuing 20-year civil war caused such destruction that it was called the Anarchy and, the *Chronicle* lamented: "Christ and his saints slept."

At the more local level, contact between the 8,000 or so Norman settlers and the native English slowly improved. Intermarriage had become common by the early 12th century. While there were no English abbots, Englishmen served as priors in monasteries and monks worked, particularly through written histories, to improve relations between the two peoples. When the Anarchy ended and Henry II ascended the throne at the end of 1154, things had changed. A century after Hastings, English had become the national language again, although the Old English names were largely lost. The English were now a race of Bobs and Johns, rather than Æthelwins and Æthelwalds.

By 1170, Richard fitz Nigel could write: "In the present day, the races have become so fused that it can scarcely be discerned who is English and who is Norman." The conquerors had, in the end, been conquered.

could arrive from elsewhere. To persuade them to open the gates, William had one of the hostages blinded in view of the men manning the city's ramparts; according to a chronicler, one defender gave answer by dropping his trousers and farting. The ensuing siege was bitterly fought, but after 18 days, the city asked for terms.

The English chroniclers state that Exeter surrendered because Gytha, along with her followers, escaped from the besieged town, leaving the citizens hoping on William's mercy. Perhaps surprisingly, William gave it, although somewhat less surprisingly, his men were not quite so merciful.

With the rising quelled, William brought his wife, Matilda, over from Normandy and, on Whitsun, she was crowned queen at Westminster. Both English and Norman lords were in attendance. It seemed that William was on his way to establishing the sort of hybrid aristocracy that, a generation before, Cnut had made following his conquest of England.

Intermarriage between Norman settlers and English natives had become common by the early 12th century

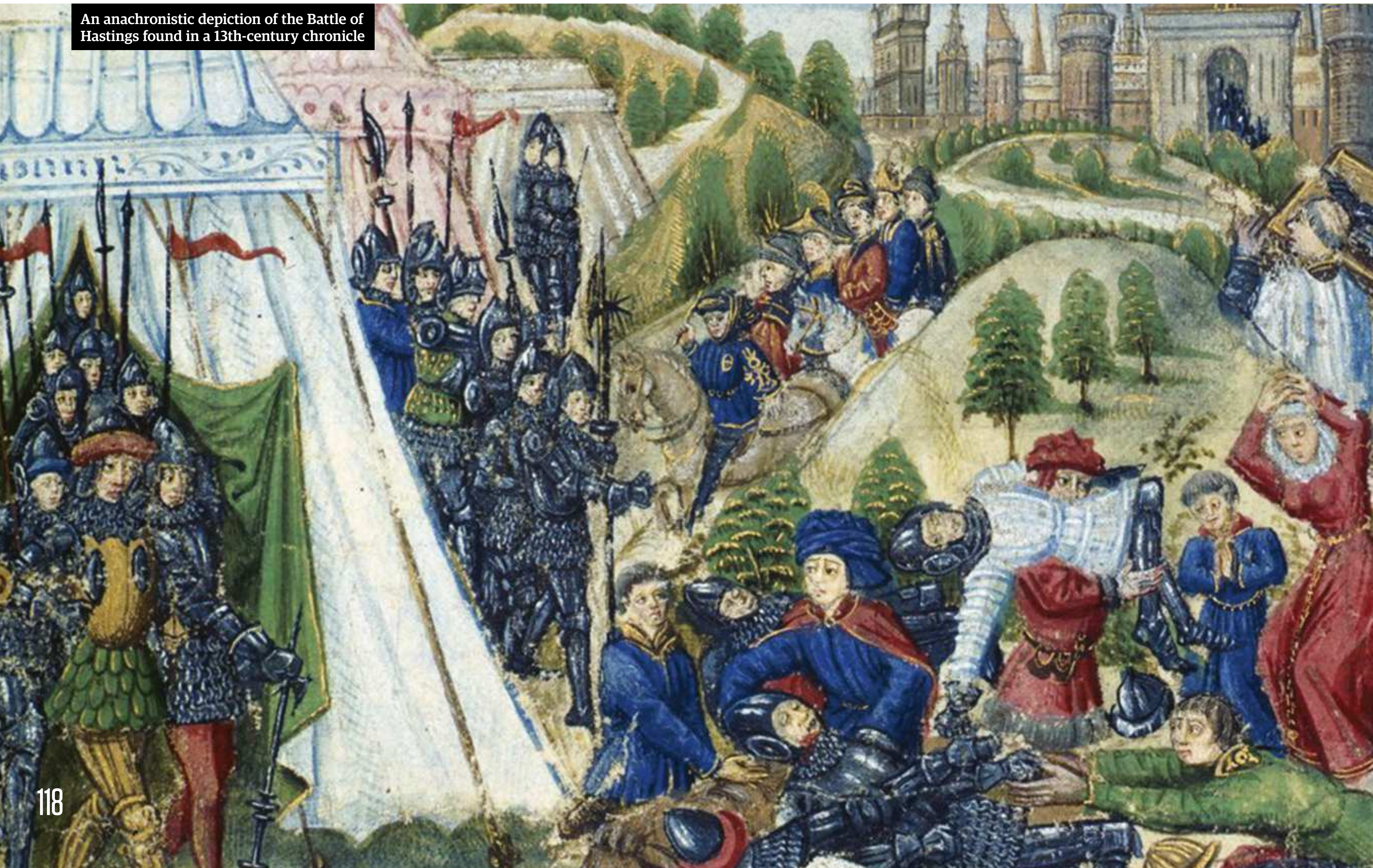
Resentment, in particular over land appropriations, was growing. Earls Eadwine and Morcar, seeing their lands whittled away, rebelled and, with such support, others rallied to their cause. Most notably Edgar Ætheling, who had evidently returned to England with William, had been able to make a getaway from his status as enforced royal houseguest and join the earls. "Then it was told the king, that the people in the north had gathered themselves together, and would stand against him if he came," the *Chronicle* reads.

William did indeed arrive, in the manner accustomed. Faced with open rebellion, led by the two most powerful English earls and with Edgar as its figurehead, William unleashed his army. The *Chronicle* records that William marched from Nottingham, to York, to Lincoln, and throughout the region. The speed with which the rebellion folded gives some indication of the devastation the Norman war machine left in its wake. But most devastating of all, for English morale at least, were the castles. William planted them in the wake of his army and the English had no answer. One chronicler explained: "In the English districts there were very few fortresses… so that, though the English were warlike and brave, they were little able to make a determined resistance."

With the rebellion failing, earls Eadwine and Morcar again submitted to William while Edgar fled north, seeking sanctuary from King Malcolm of Scotland. A notable, and surprising, feature of William's character is the mercy he showed his foes once they submitted to him – even after repeated acts of rebellion.

But with William busy in the north, Harold's sons, who had been busy raising men in Ireland, saw a chance to act. They landed in Somerset and attempted to take Bristol, but failed in the face of determined local opposition. They continued raiding until Eadnoth, a local thegn and, by his name an English one too, met them in battle. Eadnoth was killed, but Harold's boys suffered great losses too. They withdrew back to Ireland, raiding as they went. If they hoped to raise their countrymen, they had failed. Indeed, their tactics suggested they were more

> "But with William busy in the north, Harold's sons, who had been busy raising men in Ireland, saw a chance to act. They landed in Somerset and attempted to take Bristol"


An anachronistic depiction of the Battle of Hastings found in a 13th-century chronicle

concerned with paying off the men they had hired than raising the country against William.

The greatest threat to William's rule was still to come. Concerned about his lack of control in the north, William gave the rule of the lands north of the Tyne to a man named Robert Cumin. Seeking to ingratiate himself in the Norman manner, Robert ravaged his way north, stopping in Durham and lodging with the bishop. At dawn on 31 January 1069, desperate Northumbrians broke into the city and slaughtered the Flemings. Robert made a stand against the attackers in the bishop's house, but the rebels set it aflame, cutting down escapees.

As news of Robert's death spread, revolts broke out throughout the land. The governor of York castle, caught outside its walls, was killed, although the castle held out against the rebels. "But King William came from the South, unawares on them, with a large army, and put them to flight, and slew on the spot those who could not escape; which were many hundred men; and plundered the town."

However, many escaped, disappearing into the marshes and meres that surrounded low-lying York. When William went back south, the castles in York were attacked again. Meanwhile, the sons of Harold tried once more, landing near Barnstaple in mid-summer with 60-odd shiploads of men. Although they were defeated, it was at a high cost, and it all added to the sense of crisis gripping the country.

Worse was to follow. News of the repeated English uprisings had crossed the North Sea and reached the ears of King Sweyn Estridsson of Denmark, nephew of Cnut. Following his uncle's good example, Sweyn raised a fleet of ships and, late in the summer of 1069, sent it over the whale road to the shores of England, where it was met in the Humber estuary by Edgar and the northern English lords. Although Sweyn had not come himself – giving command of his fleet to his brother, Asbjorn – it must have seemed to the rebels that Norman rule would soon be brought to an end; and even more so when the panicking garrison of York sallied out to meet the Anglo-Danish army and was roundly destroyed.

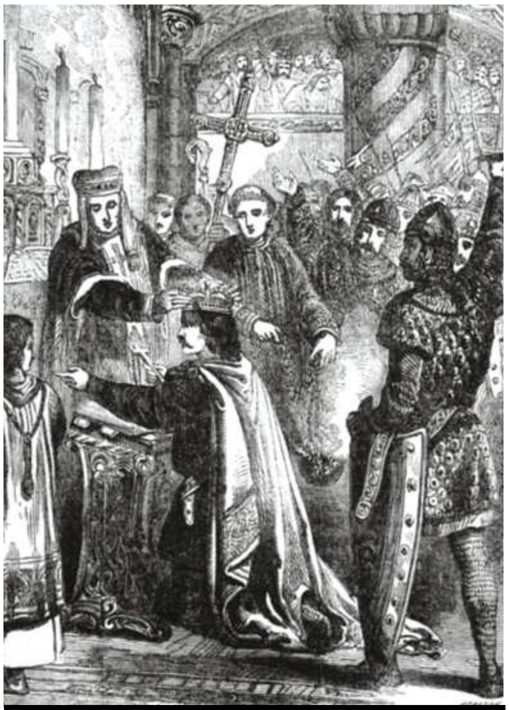
But when William came north, he found the Danes employing old Viking tactics: they had gone. Instead, they made camp on the Isle of Axholme, amid the impenetrable bogs and marshes of Lincolnshire. But as William attempted to engage with this army, news came to him of attacks all over the country: at Montacute, Exeter and Shrewsbury. William sent lieutenants to try to deal with the uprisings, but the rebels withdrew into wildernesses at the Norman approach, only to re-emerge once they had gone. It took William himself to bring some of them to battle at Stafford, where he defeated them.

On his return north, William found the Danes had again departed. It was like fighting fog, so William chose another strategy: gold. He bought Asbjorn off and gave him leave to raid the coast so long as he went home at the end of winter.

With the Danes out of the way, William turned his cold gaze on the lands around York. While he had bought off Asbjorn for now, William knew that paying the Dane meant that he would return. But William was determined that, when he did, Asbjorn would find no one and nothing waiting for him.

Thus began the Harrying of the North. William sent his men into the country around York with orders to lay everything to utter waste. This is why to this day, throughout Yorkshire, William is called the Bastard. According to one chronicler, more than 100,000 people died of starvation after crops were destroyed on William's orders. The survivors resorted to eating the dead, or selling themselves into slavery to survive. The monks of Evesham Abbey in Worcestershire remembered with horror how starving refugees would stagger into the abbey but, given food, died from eating it, their emaciated bodies unable to cope with the shock.

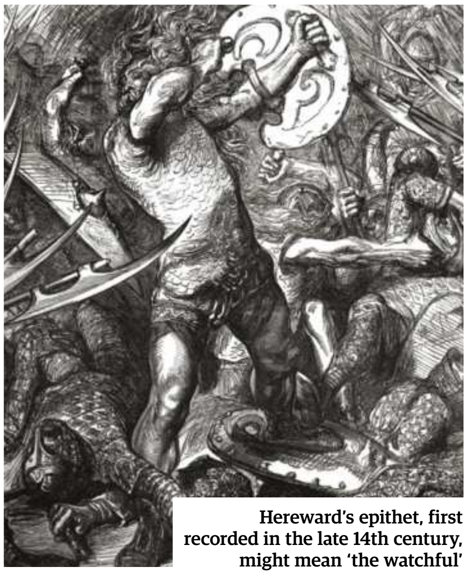
With the north roundly decimated and unable to form any resistance, William spent the first few months of 1070 finishing off the rebels in Mercia. By March, it was all over. The last serious resistance had been crushed. William had, finally, conquered.



Much of the Old English nobility attended the coronation of William the Conqueror at Westminster

Hereward the Wake

One of the most famous men who resisted the conquest is also, sadly, the worst attested historically



Hereward's epithet, first recorded in the late 14th century, might mean 'the watchful'

Hereward's later fame relies upon stories written a considerable time after the events, with much mingling of legend with the history. What we can say is that Hereward, along with his followers, sacked Peterborough Abbey, ostensibly to save its valuables from the Normans. In 1071, Hereward joined the final spasm of English resistance, led by Morcar. The earl of Northumbria had taken no part in the rebellions of the previous year but now, with his power greatly reduced, he attempted to make a stand on the Isle of Ely, amid the bogs of Fenland. The accounts vary, but William somehow brought the siege to an end, capturing Morcar and imprisoning him for the rest of his life. Hereward himself escaped the fall of Ely, disappearing into legend.

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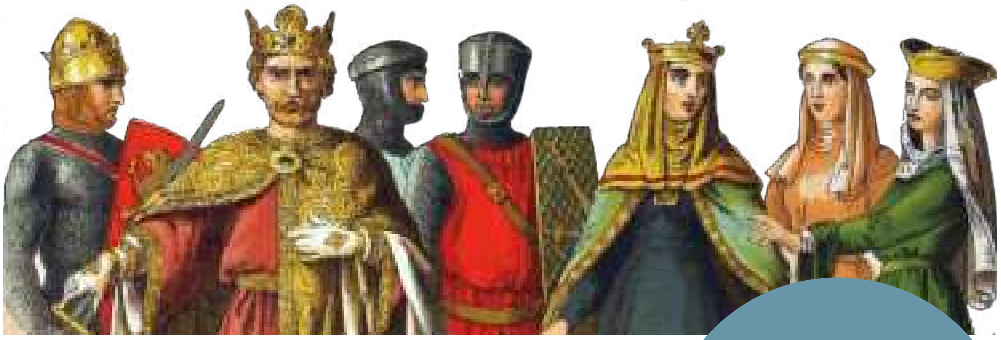
HOW HASTINGS CHANGED HISTORY

After Hastings, the Normans set about fashioning England in their own image, sweeping away centuries of tradition and enacting reforms that are still felt today

For more than six centuries, the ways of England's Anglo-Saxon rulers were the strongest threads in the cultural cloth of the land. Upon the coming of the Normans in 1066, however, the Conqueror and the upper echelons of the houses of Normandy wrought some of the most far-reaching changes on a nation in all of European history. Within a few years the Normans had replaced England's aristocracy, and in decades had transformed English attitudes, architecture, institutions, language and customs.

The effects of these are apparent still, not just in museums, classrooms and crumbling ruins, but in offices of modern government and the speech of English-speaking peoples. It had involved a great deal of violence and suffering, the killing and destitution of tens of thousands of lives and households. Yet in other areas, Norman transformations involved great creativity and skill.

We ask, what did the Normans do, and how did they do it? Here are some of the most significant repercussions of the Conquest.



Class-structure cataclysm

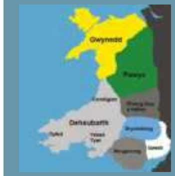
For England's aristocracy, the Norman Conquest was devastating

To tell people apart and control inheritances, men in post-Conquest England were made to adopt surnames

By treating all lands as forfeit, William was able to enact a root-and-branch reform of the Anglo-Saxon system of nobles and thegns ('king's follower'). Between May 1068, when the coronation of his wife Queen Matilda was witnessed by a mixture of English and Normans, and 1086 when William held a massive meeting at Old Sarum in Salisbury, every witnessing noble became Norman. Of *Domesday*'s tenants-in-chief, only 13 were English, a mere four with lands worth more than £100. Gone were the 90 or so king's thegns owning 40 or more hides of land (a hide equaled about 30 acres). Only around ten per cent of the 8,000 subtenants were English, indicating the 4,000-5,000 middling thegns had been expunged. Normans replaced native lords in almost every village and hamlet, sweeping away around 90 per cent of the English landowners. In 1086, just 200 Norman barons held half of England, and half of that was owned by William's family and friends. The earl of Chester had 300 manors with an annual income of £800, yet even this immense wealth paled beside William's assets, which, for owning twice as much land as all his barons combined, was worth £12,600. William constructed a monopoly, whereby every landowner in England held their lands from him as a tenant-in-chief or indirectly as the tenant of a lord, himself a king's subtenant. The aristocracy was bound to William by strict terms, and similar terms were imposed on the English Church. The old English aristocracy had been eclipsed in only a generation, its upper ranks made largely extinct, and its middle ranks forced into servitude.

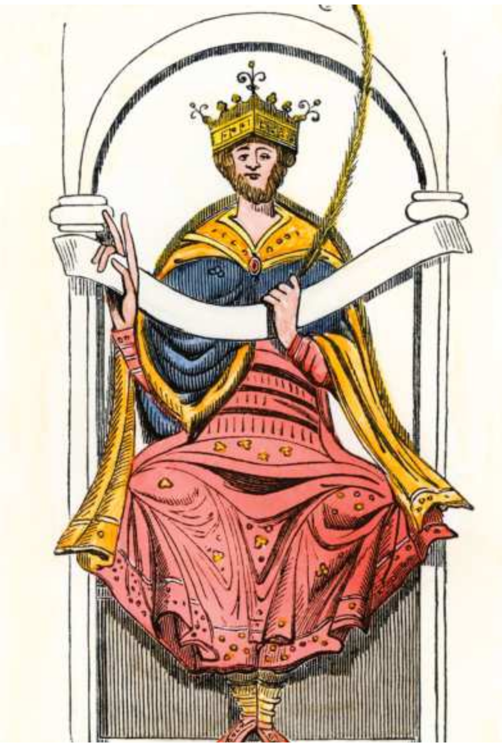
The subjugation of Wales

The Conqueror moved to tighten his grip on the Welsh kingdoms



Thanks to King's Harold's victory over the Welsh king Gruffydd ap Llywelyn in 1063, the country was in a weak and chaotic state when the Normans arrived there shortly after 1066. To prevent English rebels from joining with potential Welsh allies, the Conqueror established three new earldoms along the border with England. In south Wales, the rulers were prepared to bow to the superiority of the earl of Hereford, William FitzOsbern, and their continued alliance through the earl's son Roger enabled the Welsh ruler Caradog ap Gruffydd to destroy his neighbouring king, thereby becoming the master of all Glamorgan in 1072. Early in 1081, the enmity between Wales' various rulers culminated in the Battle of Mynydd Carn, and in the aftermath of the struggle that killed three Welsh leaders, power passed to a new king, Rhys ap Tewdwr. William needed to establish control over Rhys, so he led an army to Wales' westernmost point at St David's in Pembrokeshire in a display of strength, and established a new town and castle at Cardiff. By 1094, the Normans had built many Welsh castles. Most of the country was controlled by William's eldest son, William II, but by the turn of the 12th century most of Wales was back in Welsh control.

Throughout the rest of the Middle Ages, Wales was subject to perpetual upheavals as the pendulum of control swung back and forth between Welsh and English rulers. This chapter of struggles ended in 1294 when the country effectively became an English colony, and by 1542 its language and legal system were abolished under Henry VIII. England's lion had subjugated the Welsh dragon.



Revolts and rebellions

Holding onto the English crown involved suppressing several violent rebellions and conspiracies

After taking England's crown, retaining it proved far tougher for the Norman dynasty. The Revolt of the Earls plot was hatched at the wedding of Ralph de Guader to Roger of Hereford's sister in 1075. A third recruit, Earl Waltheof of Northumbria, had second thoughts, and was beheaded for his confession, while the others' armies were routed. This was the last serious plot against William, unique in that its leaders were French.

After William's death in 1087, argument over the division of lands between two of his sons caused disruptions lasting for several months. In the 12th century, these relatively small-scale conflicts escalated into bloody wars over England's crown. When the only legitimate son of Henry I drowned at sea in 1120, Henry tried to build support for the succession of his daughter, Matilda. But Stephen of Blois (William I's grandson) seized the throne, plunging England into a civil war known as The Anarchy. Hundreds of castles and counter-castles were built as chaos raged over England and Wales, not ebbing until 1153 when Matilda's son, Henry FitzEmpress agreed to do homage to King Stephen in return for being his successor. This was made official in the Treaty of Winchester and sealed with a 'kiss of peace' between Stephen and Henry in Winchester Cathedral.

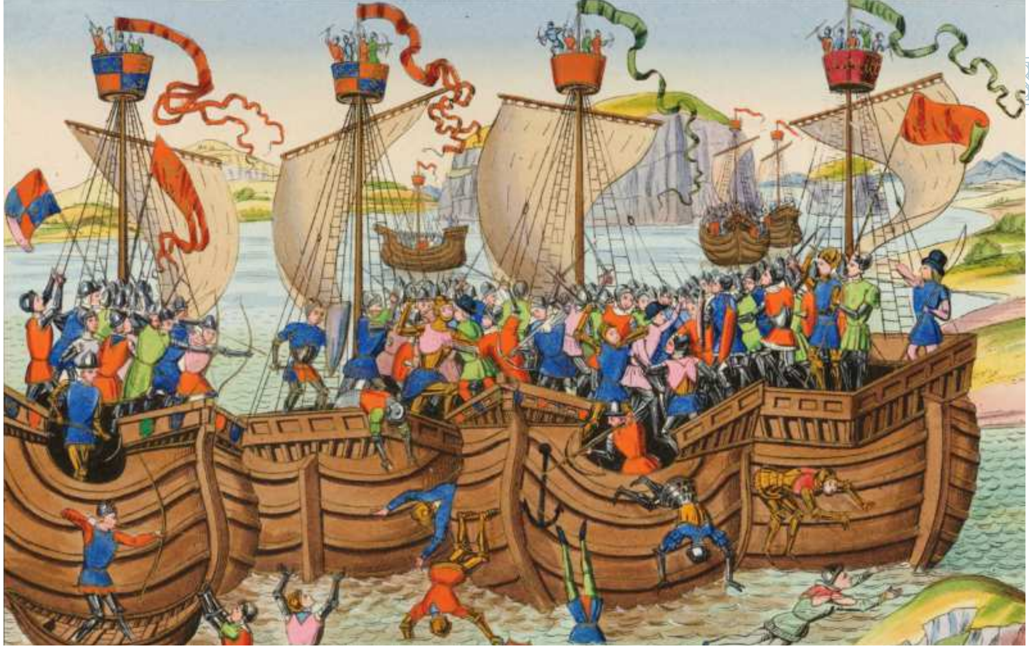
King Henry II faced the Revolt of 1173-74 by three of his sons. For a year and a half the Revolt engulfed territory from Scotland to Brittany. The day after Henry II did penance for the murder of Thomas Becket on 13 July 1174, a major rebel army was captured at the Battle of Alnwick, and he seized on this momentum to mop up the rest of the opposition. The impressive legacy of Norman power belies the terrible cost of holding onto this power, not only on their own families, but for people all over their kingdom.

Banning the slave trade

Backed by the Church, the Normans abolished slavery

From the early Iron Age right through the Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods, the slave class was a British institution and a commercial bulwark in England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. Back when the Normans had been Norsemen, slaves were constantly traded with Scandinavia from northern France, and up to the second half of the 10th century there was a thriving slave market in Rouen, the Norman capital. By the first half of the 11th century it had gone, and slavery was rare afterwards.

Right up to the eve of the Conquest, England's slave trade flourished, after which many slaves (ten per cent of whom made up the population) were emancipated by Norman masters, and given houses and plots of lands on which to live. Economic factors for this decline are possible, but perhaps greater was the moral pressure brought to bear by reforming Church leaders on the dukes of Normandy. William the Conqueror had a financial interest in slavery, yet he acted to curtail the trade with his so-called Laws, a move that showed him to accord with the Church's humane approach, even if the manumission of slaves hurt him financially. After William's death, the Church reinforced William's anti-slavery position, declaring in the 1102 Synod of London that "never again should anyone engage in the infamous business, prevalent in England, of selling men like animals". By that time slavery had virtually vanished in France, central Italy, and Spanish Catalonia.



English emigration

Hundreds of Englishmen fled after the Conquest

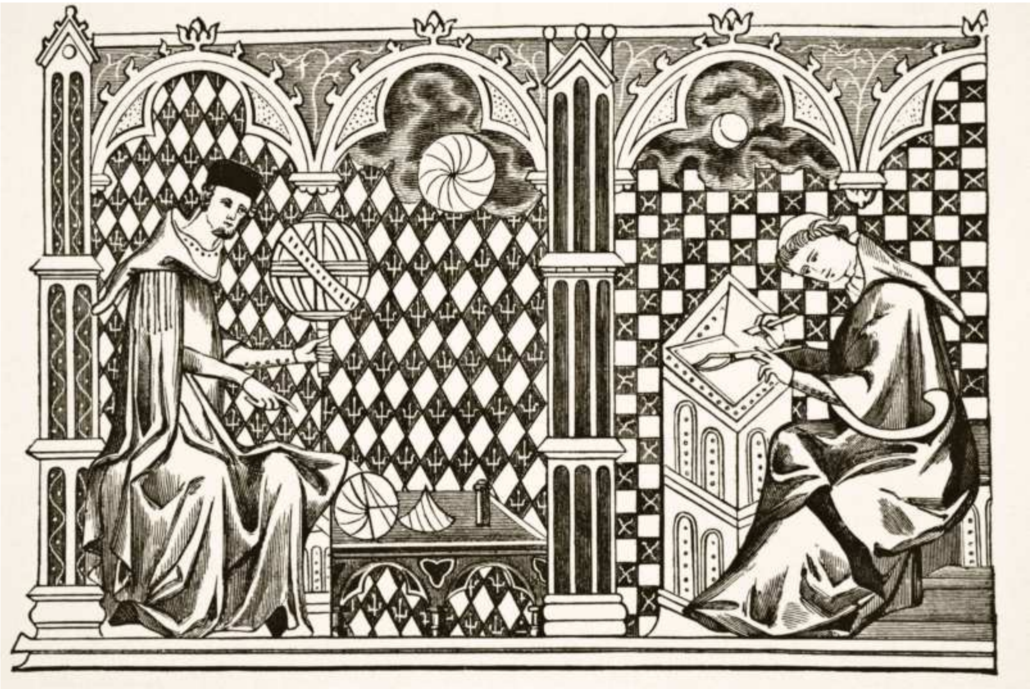
Norman rule proved beyond the pale for many Anglo-Saxons, seeking refuge in Scotland, Scandinavia, or Ireland from where King Harold's family launched invasions without success. An Icelandic saga records the greatest exodus, one consisting of 350 ships (235 in another source) that sailed for the Byzantine Empire. Led by Earl Siward of Gloucester, they sailed to Ceuta on Morocco's northern coast, killing its Muslim occupants and plundering its treasure. Following the seizure of Majorca and Minorca, they sailed to Constantinople where, for defeating the besieging fleet, Emperor Alexius I Comneus allowed them to live in service as part of the elite Varangian Guard. This offer was tempting to some since the Varangians only battled at critical junctures and had first dibs at any spoils. Yet Earl Siward and others wanted their own realm, so Alexius granted them land "six days north and northeast of Constantinople", where Siward repelled the heathens and established New England with towns named after those in the homeland, like London and York. Or so it is said, for while the assimilation of Anglo-Saxons into the Varangian Guard at this time is historically attested, the identity of Earl Siward and the historicity of the New England colony have been impossible to verify. The Crimean Peninsula has been proposed by at least one leading Byzantine historian, including a potential site where Anglo-Saxon emigrants founded a 'New London'. Even today, some people in Eastern Europe claim descent from these Medieval immigrants.

Planting forests

William's love of hunting legislated in Forest Law

Despite esteeming hunting and huntsmen in their pagan mythology, Anglo-Saxon monarchs appear to have allowed their kinsmen to take forests for granted, making no effort to protect them or their wildlife from unrestricted hunting. The Normans changed this over the 11th century with the introduction of Forest Law. William the Conqueror was notoriously keen on hunting, with the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* stating: "He loved the stags as much as if he were their father". The term 'forest', which first appears in England in the Domesday Book, applied to any kind of land reserved for the recreational hunting of the king and his guests. Its own law was designed to protect the 'noble' animals of the chase: red and fallow deer, roe deer, marten, wild boar, wolf, and the hare. Also protected were the fowl birds coney, pheasant and partridge. Forest Law operated outside common law and was rigorously enforced by a hierarchy of guards, who surveilled these lands and meted out punishments to poachers. The *Rime of King William* (1086) says that "whoever killed a hart or a hind should be blinded", for example. The most famous of the forests created by William was the New Forest in Hampshire, a place whose relative peacefulness nowadays (except in the summer season) gives no clue as to the hundreds of people who, on William's orders, were expelled from their homes in some 20 villages and a dozen hamlets to make the area fit only for the inhabitation of animals. Despite, or perhaps because of, Forest Law, the boar became extinct in England's wilds in the 13th century, and the wolf by the late 15th century.

By 1091 Sicily was under Norman control until William III was overthrown by Holy Roman Emperor Henry VI in 1194



The first time a King of England visited Ireland was when Henry II landed at Waterford on 17 October 1171

Religious revolution

Normans started a religious resurgence with laws and building works

In August 1070, William managed to appoint a new archbishop of Canterbury, his long-time friend, spiritual advisor and the most celebrated scholar in Europe, Lanfranc. Both men saw the English Church as in need of reform and introduced separate church courts, archdeacons and church councils. Practices such as simony (selling church roles) and clerical marriage were banned, although Lanfranc allowed priests to keep existing partners, perhaps mindful to avoid the riot that almost killed the archbishop of Rouen in 1072 when he forbade the wives of married clerics from conducting themselves in public.

In terms of architecture, Archbishop Lanfranc instigated a revolution that endures to this day. In December 1067, fire gutted the cathedral church of Canterbury, and Lanfranc commissioned a building in the new Romanesque style. In 1072 construction began on Lincoln Cathedral, and over the decade new cathedrals and abbey churches began at Salisbury, Chichester, Rochester, St Albans and Winchester, prompting William of Malmesbury to remark, “You do not know which to admire more, the beauty or the speed.”

Soon after the Harrying of the North in 1069, a religious revival in the north saw monasteries founded or restored at Selby, Jarrow, Whitby, Monkwearmouth, Durham and York. 70 years after the Conquest, the number of monasteries in England had more than quadrupled from about 60 to almost 300. By the 1120s William of Malmesbury wrote, “You may see everywhere churches in villages, in towns and cities, monasteries rising in a new style of architecture, and with a new devotion our country flourishes.”

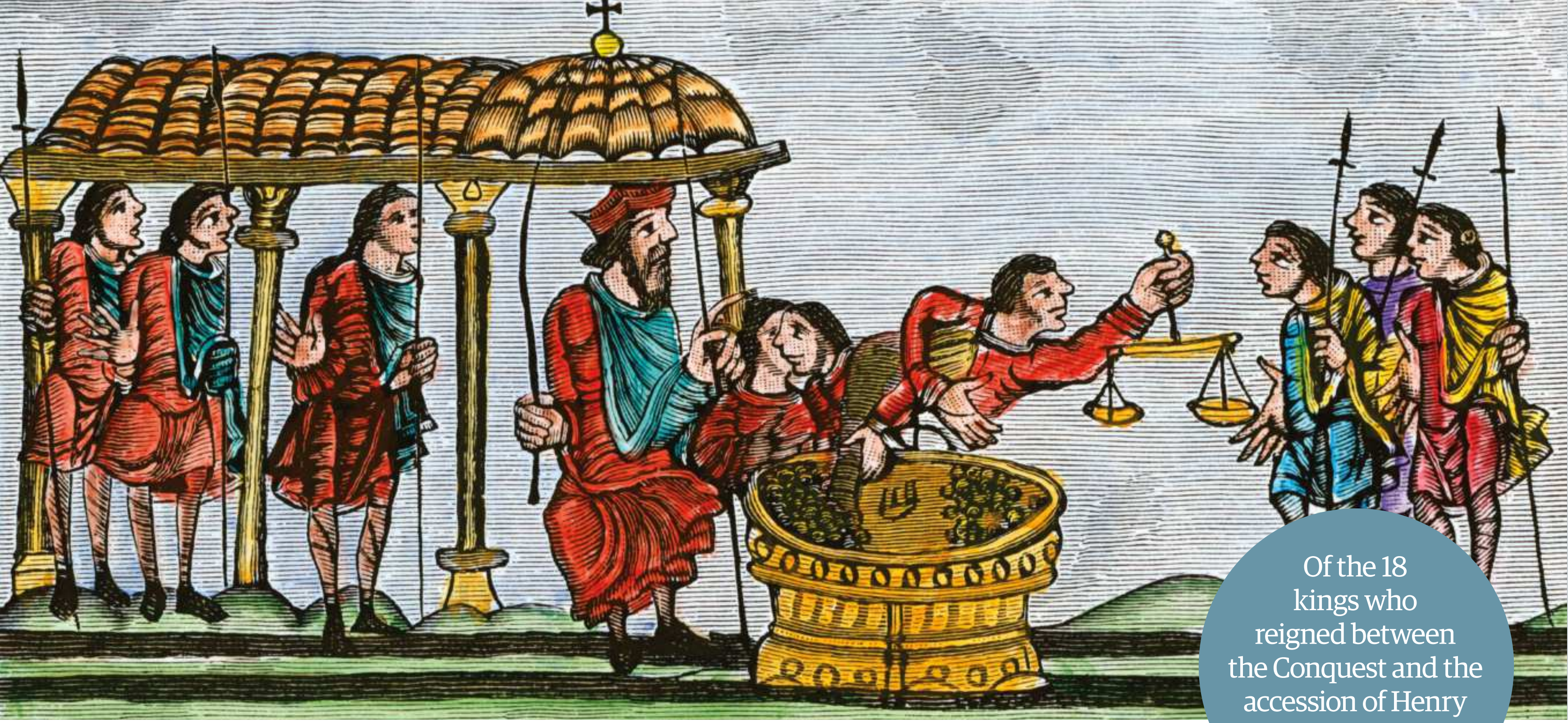
The other most visible legacy of the Normans are castles, mostly motte-and-bailey or ringwork constructs, which were easy to defend. Arguably the most iconic example of Norman building is the White Tower, the central keep at the Tower of London, which was started by William I in the 1070s as a royal palace, and not completed until more than a decade after his death, at which time it became a prison. Not since the Romans had constructions like these been seen in England.

Establishing juries

The Normans strengthened the Anglo-Saxon legal system

While unable to claim it as being entirely their innovation, the Norman dynasty established trial by jury as a constitutional aspect of English legal custom, greatly enlarging the scale of its deployment to resolve the disputes of the population under their rule. Seventy years before the Conquest, the ‘twelve leading thegns’ of the wapentake (the Anglo-Saxon assembly) who swore never to accuse the innocent or protect the guilty were the foundation of what later became juries. Such juries were used by William the Conqueror to make the *Domesday Book*; otherwise, disputes between Englishmen and Frenchmen were decided via trial by combat (the European method) or the ‘ordeal by iron’ – carrying or walking across red-hot metal (the Anglo-Saxon method).

These methods were replaced by the ‘assizes’ under Henry II. The ‘grand assize’ for deciding actions of right consisted of 12 knights, and the ‘petty assize’ of freemen decided disputes of possession or inheritance. Jurors were expected to be men of local standing who knew the facts about a case, effectively acting as witnesses before the king’s justices. Assizes in some towns called on jurors to openly name neighbours of theirs who they suspected of serious offences, which was an invitation to settle scores. The idea was to purge England of wrongdoers at a fell stroke, but although many were accused, few were ever caught. The effect was to scatter outlaws into England’s greenwoods, clarifying over time into the semi-legendary figure of Robin Hood.



Of the 18 kings who reigned between the Conquest and the accession of Henry VII in 1485, ten died violently

Monetary reform

The systems of coinage and taxations were overhauled and modernised

In pre-Conquest England, the geld (public tax) was a dependable cash cow for the rulers. The lion's share of it was needed to pay off invaders and maintain a large fleet to repel invasions and make conquests (except under Edward the Confessor, who did away with his fleet in 1051). By 1066 and some time after, however, the king was gradually receiving less money for several reasons. The amount of lands eligible for assessment (hides) was being eroded due to concessions granted in exchange for the king's ear. Due to the Normans' genocidal rampages in the north and along the southern coast and Welsh borders, as well as castle-building projects that wasted a lot of land, the surge in lands unfit for cultivation reduced revenue even more. Also, the debasement of the silver coin currency with inferior metals, as well as the Forest becoming a tax-free zone, even point-blank refusals to pay geld, all threatened a cash crisis for the Norman dynasty. Norman landlords increased their tenants' rents to levels that weighed heavily on the peasantry. The number of freemen plummeted to a fraction of their pre-Conquest levels, while the number of servile peasants rocketed.

The Domesday Book abounds with complaints about rents exceeding the value of the land, and the phrase "he is now a villein" is common, meaning a former landowner had become a lowly villager. To claw back money to fund a war in Maine, northern France, William tripled the geld rate in 1084. Coming on the heels of a famine in 1082, it was a double-whammy for the population, still recovering from the various crackdowns. "The king and his leading men," said the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, "were fond, yea, too fond of avarice: they coveted gold and silver, and did not care how sinfully it was obtained." To combat the silver currency problem, Henry I reformed the coinage three times in the 12th century, inflicting harsh physical punishments to anyone who debased his coin, and established the greatest of England's Medieval institutions; the Exchequer. The sessions held at this table ensured that the king's money was duly collected and then spent in the right place at the right time, and by the right people.

Language and literature

The Normans enriched England's language and literature

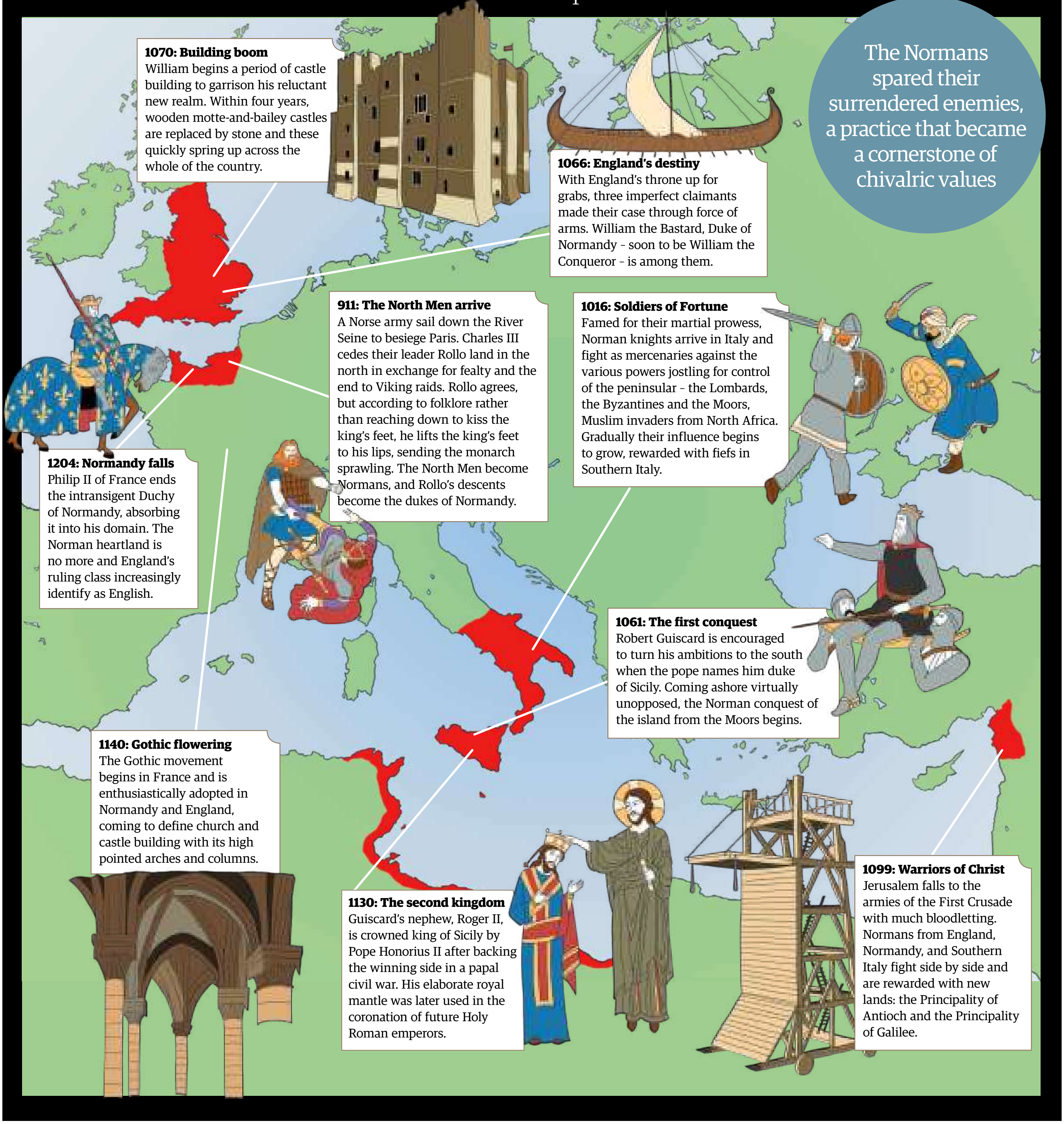
One of the Normans' most profound and far-reaching effects on England's culture is in the sphere of language and literacy. At first, William the Conqueror issued his instructions in written English, but he tried and failed to learn English, and with a handful of exceptions it stopped being the official language of government after 1070, and English literature sharply declined too. "Now that teaching is forsaken, and the folk are lost," lamented one of the few poets using English after 1066. "Now there is another people which teaches our folk. And many of our teachers are damned and our folk with them."

By the end of the 1100s, hardly anyone could read Old English, yet French and Latin from the Normans enriched the Isles' vernacular. A hallmark of English identity for the Normans' descendants became bilingualism, with educated people learning Latin as well. In the late 1200s Robert of Gloucester wrote, "Unless a man knows French he is little thought of, but low-born men keep to English and to their own speech still." Today's legal vocabulary mainly consists of words rooted in French (agreement, burglary, court, debt, evidence, justice, fines, prison, constables, arrests, etcetera). Ironically, the French had no written literature of their own until it was pioneered in post-Conquest England. Possibly inspired by Anglo-Saxon literature like *Beowulf*, in the century following the Conquest a splendid literary revival (in Latin and French) took place in England in parallel with the rise of chivalry and values like courtly romance and questing.

The *Chanson de Roland*, an epic poem of Charlemagne's wars against the Saracens, was composed in England in the early 12th century. The first historical work in French was Geoffrey Gaimar's *History of the English* (c.1136-37). English authors, often of mixed Anglo-Norman families, attained a Continental influence rarely equaled since. The most extraordinary of these works, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c.1136) plumbed legend and fantasy to create an epic that became one of the most popular historical works in the European Middle Ages. Walter Map, a Herefordshire priest at Henry II's court, wrote a French version of the Holy Grail and Lancelot stories in c.1180. Surviving copies of this work outnumber any other medieval manuscript.

From conquest to culture

In less than three centuries, the Normans rewrote the rules and carved out land across Europe and the Near East



1070: Building boom
William begins a period of castle building to garrison his reluctant new realm. Within four years, wooden motte-and-bailey castles are replaced by stone and these quickly spring up across the whole of the country.

1066: England's destiny
With England's throne up for grabs, three imperfect claimants made their case through force of arms. William the Bastard, Duke of Normandy - soon to be William the Conqueror - is among them.

The Normans spared their surrendered enemies, a practice that became a cornerstone of chivalric values

911: The North Men arrive
A Norse army sail down the River Seine to besiege Paris. Charles III cedes their leader Rollo land in the north in exchange for fealty and the end to Viking raids. Rollo agrees, but according to folklore rather than reaching down to kiss the king's feet, he lifts the king's feet to his lips, sending the monarch sprawling. The North Men become Normans, and Rollo's descents become the dukes of Normandy.

1016: Soldiers of Fortune
Famed for their martial prowess, Norman knights arrive in Italy and fight as mercenaries against the various powers jostling for control of the peninsular - the Lombards, the Byzantines and the Moors, Muslim invaders from North Africa. Gradually their influence begins to grow, rewarded with fiefs in Southern Italy.

1204: Normandy falls
Philip II of France ends the intransigent Duchy of Normandy, absorbing it into his domain. The Norman heartland is no more and England's ruling class increasingly identify as English.

1061: The first conquest
Robert Guiscard is encouraged to turn his ambitions to the south when the pope names him duke of Sicily. Coming ashore virtually unopposed, the Norman conquest of the island from the Moors begins.

1140: Gothic flowering
The Gothic movement begins in France and is enthusiastically adopted in Normandy and England, coming to define church and castle building with its high pointed arches and columns.

1130: The second kingdom
Guiscard's nephew, Roger II, is crowned king of Sicily by Pope Honorius II after backing the winning side in a papal civil war. His elaborate royal mantle was later used in the coronation of future Holy Roman emperors.

1099: Warriors of Christ
Jerusalem falls to the armies of the First Crusade with much bloodletting. Normans from England, Normandy, and Southern Italy fight side by side and are rewarded with new lands: the Principality of Antioch and the Principality of Galilee.

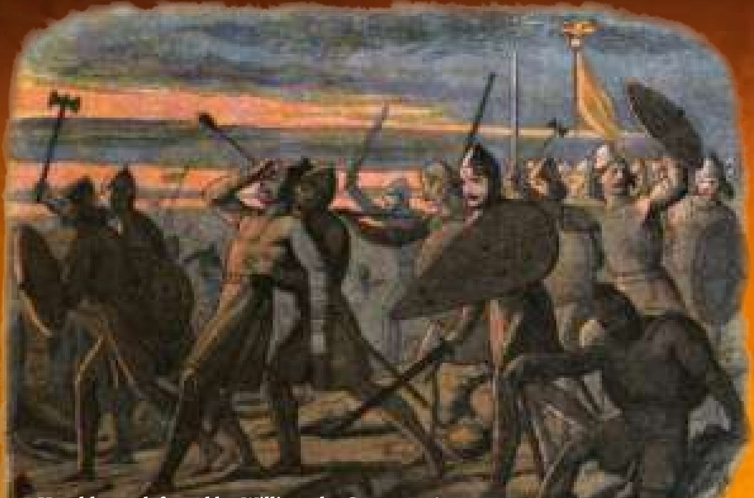
WHAT IF?

With the clash of three kings, England faced three fates

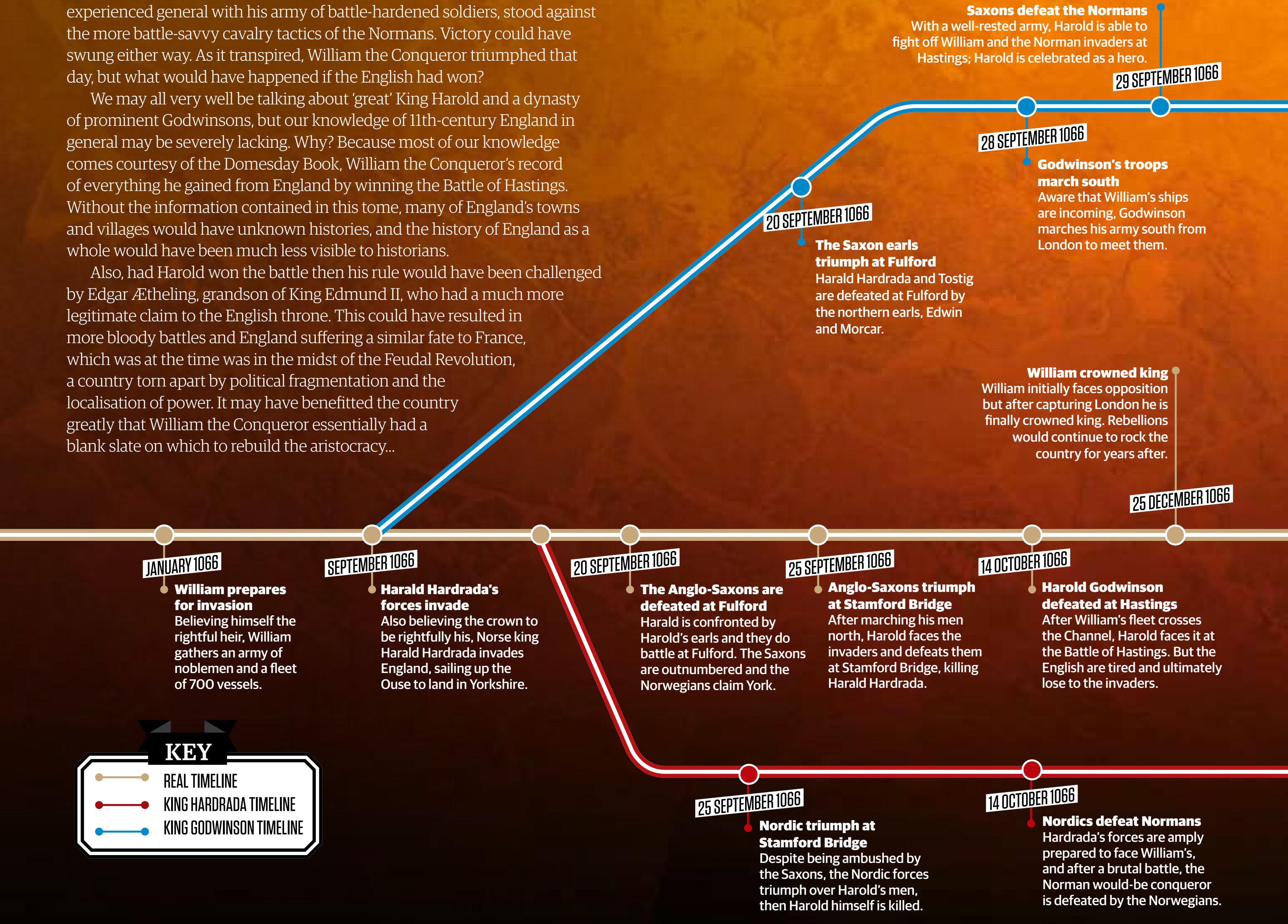
Having already triumphed at Stamford Bridge, Harold and his army - the smell of blood still fresh in their nostrils - made haste from Yorkshire to the Sussex coast to challenge the army of Duke William 'the Bastard' of Normandy at Hastings. The ensuing battle was evenly matched with both sides suffering heavy casualties. Harold, the experienced general with his army of battle-hardened soldiers, stood against the more battle-savvy cavalry tactics of the Normans. Victory could have swung either way. As it transpired, William the Conqueror triumphed that day, but what would have happened if the English had won?

We may all very well be talking about 'great' King Harold and a dynasty of prominent Godwinsons, but our knowledge of 11th-century England in general may be severely lacking. Why? Because most of our knowledge comes courtesy of the Domesday Book, William the Conqueror's record of everything he gained from England by winning the Battle of Hastings. Without the information contained in this tome, many of England's towns and villages would have unknown histories, and the history of England as a whole would have been much less visible to historians.

Also, had Harold won the battle then his rule would have been challenged by Edgar Ætheling, grandson of King Edmund II, who had a much more legitimate claim to the English throne. This could have resulted in more bloody battles and England suffering a similar fate to France, which was at the time was in the midst of the Feudal Revolution, a country torn apart by political fragmentation and the localisation of power. It may have benefitted the country greatly that William the Conqueror essentially had a blank slate on which to rebuild the aristocracy...



Harold was defeated by William the Conqueror's army at Hastings, but what if the arrow had embedded itself in his eye instead of Harold's?



JANUARY 1066

William prepares for invasion
Believing himself the rightful heir, William gathers an army of noblemen and a fleet of 700 vessels.

SEPTEMBER 1066

Harald Hardrada's forces invade
Also believing the crown to be rightfully his, Norse king Harald Hardrada invades England, sailing up the Ouse to land in Yorkshire.

20 SEPTEMBER 1066

The Anglo-Saxons are defeated at Fulford
Harold is confronted by Harald's earls and they do battle at Fulford. The Saxons are outnumbered and the Norwegians claim York.

25 SEPTEMBER 1066

Anglo-Saxons triumph at Stamford Bridge
After marching his men north, Harold faces the invaders and defeats them at Stamford Bridge, killing Harald Hardrada.

14 OCTOBER 1066

Harold Godwinson defeated at Hastings
After William's fleet crosses the Channel, Harold faces it at the Battle of Hastings. But the English are tired and ultimately lose to the invaders.

25 DECEMBER 1066

William crowned king
William initially faces opposition but after capturing London he is finally crowned king. Rebellions would continue to rock the country for years after.

25 SEPTEMBER 1066

Nordic triumph at Stamford Bridge
Despite being ambushed by the Saxons, the Nordic forces triumph over Harold's men, then Harold himself is killed.

14 OCTOBER 1066

Nordics defeat Normans
Hardrada's forces are amply prepared to face William's, and after a brutal battle, the Norman would-be conqueror is defeated by the Norwegians.

20 SEPTEMBER 1066

The Saxon earls triumph at Fulford
Harald Hardrada and Tostig are defeated at Fulford by the northern earls, Edwin and Morcar.

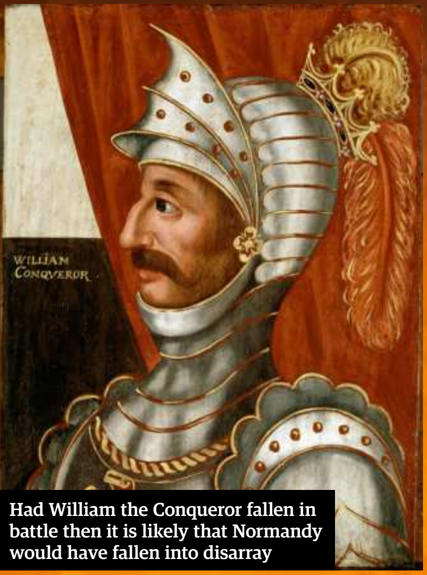
28 SEPTEMBER 1066

Godwinson's troops march south
Aware that William's ships are incoming, Godwinson marches his army south from London to meet them.

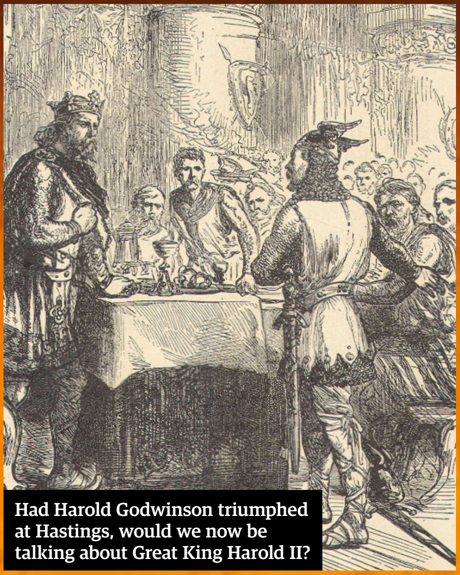
29 SEPTEMBER 1066

Saxons defeat the Normans
With a well-rested army, Harold is able to fight off William and the Norman invaders at Hastings; Harold is celebrated as a hero.

KEY
- REAL TIMELINE
- KING HARDRADA TIMELINE
- KING GODWINSON TIMELINE



Had William the Conqueror fallen in battle then it is likely that Normandy would have fallen into disarray



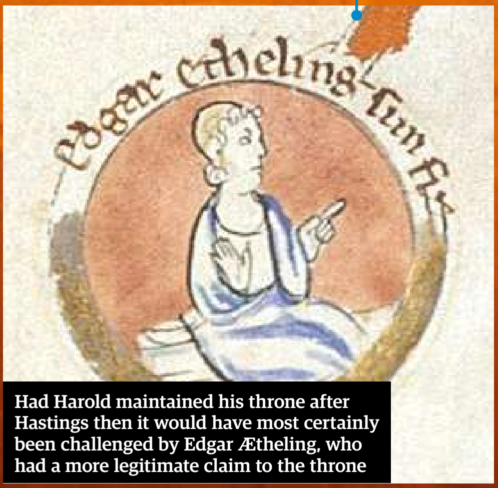
Had Harold Godwinson triumphed at Hastings, would we now be talking about Great King Harold II?

> “William triumphed that fateful day, but what would have happened if the English had won the battle?”

10 OCTOBER 1066

Normandy falls into disarray
Left leaderless, with a king in his infancy, Normandy descends into civil strife that will continue for two decades.

1067



Had Harold maintained his throne after Hastings then it would have most certainly been challenged by Edgar Ætheling, who had a more legitimate claim to the throne

1068

A kingdom at peace
Through careful negotiation, Harold is able to contain the raids by the Celts and strike a deal with Wales and Scotland, leaving the island divided, but at peace.

1072

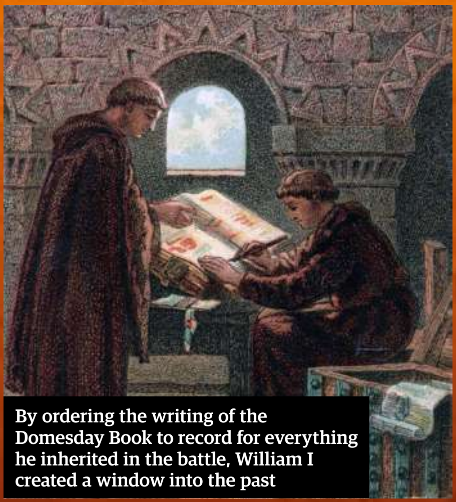
England grows strong
Harold exploits France, claiming many strategic ports without issue. He also forms strong bonds with Scandinavia, making him a powerful figure in Europe.

1200s

The Northern Empire expands
With its strong trade routes, the Northern Empire of Europe steadily expands. This trade network spans all the way from the Americas to the eastern Mediterranean.

1300s

Southern Europe falls
After many wars between the countries of southern Europe, the Northern Empire fully dominates Europe, with Scandinavian culture engulfing the Latin influences.



By ordering the writing of the Domesday Book to record for everything he inherited in the battle, William I created a window into the past

1069-70

William strikes back
In response to the northern rebels stirring up trouble, William carries out a series of bloody campaigns known as the Harrying of the North.

1080s

The Tower of London is built
In an effort to secure control over England, William orders the construction of many castles, the most famous being the White Tower of the Tower of London.

1085

The Domesday Book is created
To further secure the land holdings of himself and his vassals, William orders the creation of the Domesday Book.

9 SEPTEMBER 1087

Death of William
While on a military campaign, William falls ill and dies. His death begins a war between his two sons for control of his kingdoms of England and Normandy.

1135-54

Civil war reigns supreme
After the death of William's fourth son, Henry I, a succession crisis sparks a brutal civil war known as the Anarchy.

21 NOVEMBER 1066

Hardrada is crowned
In a country that has previously been ruled by Scandinavian kings, Hardrada is able to persuade any would-be rebels to accept his rule.

1080s

England gets Norse
Nordic influences take hold of England: the language becomes heavily Nordic, and the battle-axe becomes the primary weapon of choice.

1110

Norway grows strong
With Norway growing stronger, it faces its enemy France in a bloody war that wages for years. Finally the Nordic forces claim victory and the spoils are divided.

1200

The Nordic Empire expands
The Nordic Empire becomes one of the most formidable in Europe; this powerful axis crushes the influence of the Catholic Church and its associated nations.

1390

America is re-discovered
Due to the strong British/Norse partnership, the Nordics land in America, claiming the land long before their Spanish rivals. The country is quickly developed.

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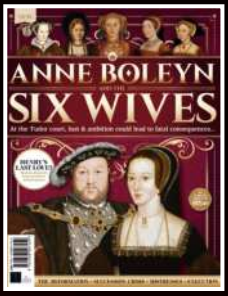
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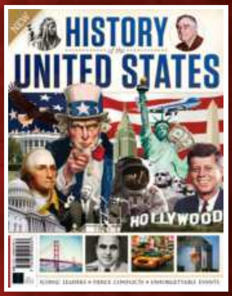
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